

The Belles of Shangri-La
and Other Stories of Sex, Snakes,
and Survival from World War II



George "Doc" Abraham

THE BELLES OF SHANGRI-LA

**AND OTHER STORIES OF SEX, SNAKES,
AND SURVIVAL FROM WORLD WAR II**

George “Doc” Abraham

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FIRST EDITION

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To my wife, Katy, whose love
brought me home from the war



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Foreword

(by Doc Abraham)

A 1999 Veteran's Administration Report about "the greatest generation"—the name Tom Brokaw gives to those who fought in World War II—prompts this book. The report states that World War II vets are dying at the rate of thirty-two hundred a month.

So many veterans' stories, more than a half century after the end of the war, are yet to be told: this one is mine. It is a story that has fascinated my family, my kids and close friends. My wife Katy, and reporter and friend Kevin Frisch have encouraged me to tell it. Kevin applied his great touch as a journalist to this manuscript, adding zest and clarity.

It is a story of four and a half years in the U.S. Army—most of it spent in Africa in one of the Army's first and few integrated units. It is a chance to pause and reflect and say thanks to my fellow soldiers in Task Force 5889. I dedicate this book, in part, to them.

The hundreds of photos I took—many of which are in this book—show a place where the indigenous people welcomed us with warmth, curiosity and kindness, where malaria raged and snakes the length of tractor trailers scared the hell out of the unsuspecting.

It is a story of "race relations" well before a time when race relations was a topic of TV talk shows. It is a story of men shipped to a far-away place, charged with what may seem now as a far-fetched mission: to safeguard the rubber plantations from the enemy.

But all these years later, I realize it is a story of a great love, I married my “war bride” Katy on a thirty-six hour leave—as did so many young soldiers—and was shipped out a few months after.

Katy’s letters, her love, and her belief that I would return to raise a family and fulfill our dreams sustained me, and continue to. So I also dedicate this book to her. And Katy and I both give thanks to the old African woman who found me and fed me while lost in the jungle—she saved my life.

George “Doc” Abraham
Naples, New York
January 2000

Foreword

(by *Katy Abraham*)

During the Gulf War, a young woman whose husband had been shipped to Saudi Arabia came to me one night in tears. Her husband had not been able to call her for a week and she was "worried sick." I calmed her. But I did not tell her that she was lucky. Perhaps I should have, for it is important for today's generations to know that warfare, always horrible, did not always offer the prospect of frequent and close communication with family.

Like many young women during World War II, I quit college to join the war effort; and like many wives whose husbands were overseas, I wrote to mine almost daily, but sometimes did not know his whereabouts or his welfare for months. Wondering "what is he doing, how is he, where is he?" was part of our lives and sustained our writing.

When the war was over and husbands came home, no one looked back: we all looked ahead. People set out to live their lives; to get a job, to raise a family, to pursue their dreams. The tragedy, sacrifice, and pain of the war was something everyone wanted to put behind them. But if that young woman should visit me again, I'd give a cup of tea and tell her my story, which mirrors that of so many other World War II wives.

New Year's Eve 1940 Doc and I spent in Times Square. The crowd was festive, but war clouds were gathering in Europe and everyone talked of what it meant for the U.S. Doc was drafted in early 1941; and of course, we entered the war in December

of that year. On New Year's Eve '41 everyone was in a much more somber mood. I'd quit Cornell University to work for the Army Ordinance in Ithaca and Troy, New York and eventually in Philadelphia—wherever I was sent.

Doc got a thirty-six hour leave on July 4th, 1942 from Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Sensing he'd be soon sent overseas, I hurried down to meet—and marry—him. We didn't have time for the blood tests in North Carolina—so with other Army couples we went to Dillon, South Carolina, where there was no "waiting period." A wonderful judge and his wife held a series of ceremonies and pronounced each eager couple man and wife.

Doc got his orders to be shipped out a few weeks later—neither of us knew where to. It took weeks for his telegrams to reach me, and my letters to reach him. I only figured out he was in Liberia, Africa, thanks to some sleuthing and tracing of his messages through folks I'll never know but I'll always thank in Akron, Ohio, home of Firestone Tires, one of the companies whose rubber plantations I later learned Doc's Task Force was guarding.

We didn't see or talk with each other for three years. Our letters were censored; but he still managed to send me profoundly interesting photos—some of which are in this book—and descriptions of what Kevin Frisch calls "little told stories of a well-known War."

Few people know very much about the Africa campaign: Doc's anecdotes give you a series of snapshots of the war that didn't make the history books. They are important snapshots—for many reasons, none more important than they tell how several hundred black and white American soldiers found common cause serving their country for three years in a land far away. And while some of the anecdotes, which tell of such things as Army-sponsored brothels, healing by witch doctors, and the like, many seem "politically incorrect" in these days as we enter the new millennium, the descriptions he and his fellow soldiers

sent home captured Army life in Northern, Western and Eastern Africa from 1942–45.

We invite you to “listen” to Doc’s stories and share the photos our family has treasured for more than 50 years.

Katy Abraham
Naples, New York
January 2000

Aboard the Parker House Roll

We boarded the troop ship *Parker House* (dubbed the “Parker House Roll” because of the way it rolled in the sea) in the fall of 1942. It was scary. At four o’clock on a foggy morning, the ship slid by the skyline of New York City. All you could hear was the whirl of the propellers. As the craft sliced through the waters, our only thought was, “Will we ever see New York again?” Suddenly, we heard someone screaming, “I’ll never go! I’ll die here first!” A GI tried to jump overboard and a flock of Military Police nabbed him. Said one: “We’ve got a good place for you: The front lines.”

We were on board thirty-two days. Seventy-six white men and two thousand black infantry men crowded into a banana boat converted into a troop ship. The white troops got the fifth hold of the ship, whereas the black troops got the upper holds. “Fear of uprising,” one officer said.

Life on the boat separated the men from the boys right from the start. We were issued one canteen of drinking water (a pint) a day. Our helmet was our wash basin and we could have all the sea water we wanted for bathing. Unfortunately, sea water and soap don’t mix. As one GI said, “It don’t soapify.”

At 4:00 A.M., breakfast was ready. It smelled good but tasted horrible. Boiled eggs, powdered milk, and a canteen cup of coffee—all we got to last us until chow at 6:00 P.M. Copper ions from the kettle turned the eggs a bilious green color. People were vomiting everywhere. You stood up to eat, packed like upright sardines. It was not uncommon to have someone vomit right on

you. The floor was slippery from an inch of human vomit. The sink was a long tube cut in half, and, if you were lucky, you could reach it to vomit in there. The sight of vomit and water sloshing around created more vomit. They had garbage cans for soldiers who had to toss their cookies. Often, you would find four to six GIs bent double, disgorging their stomach contents.

Day after day this continued. For more than a month, we never removed our clothes, except to go to the latrine—another breath-taking view. “Where are we going?” everyone would ask. No word. One soldier with a sense of humor said, “Well, boys, I talked to the captain and found out where we’re going.”

“Where? Where? Where?” everyone asked.

“If you’re quiet, I’ll tell you. Now listen up. The first sergeant begged me not to tell, but I know you won’t say a word.”

“Tell us where we’re going!”

“We’re going to Fort Web,” he told us.

“Fort Web? Where in hell is that?”

“Everyone knows where Fort Web is,” he answered. “It’s up a spider’s ass.”

Regardless of how we felt, it was a funny joke.

Every outfit has a comedian who’s a real survivor. We had one, a chubby private who went by the name of Sea Biscuit. Sea Biscuit was a soldier who had never meant to be a soldier. He was jolly and the troops loved him—but the Army didn’t. Sea Biscuit was always cutting up, asking questions, disobeying orders and thinking for himself—attributes that do not make for a good soldier.

Sea Biscuit had been known, seaside, to enter an officer’s barracks, help himself to his bars and cap, and head out for an evening on the town, impersonating an officer the entire time. He loved to watch the enlisted men snap to attention whenever he entered a room. “At ease,” he quickly commanded them.

A soldier who did not respect the Army’s officers had, as one might imagine, little use for the Army’s rules. This disrespect

manifested itself in ways both large and small. For instance, Sea Biscuit was well known for routinely making his cot in the record time of less than a minute. So what if the cot had a lump of bedding in the center covered over by a blanket? Sea Biscuit didn't care.

What Sea Biscuit did care about was women—he had a fondness for them which could sometimes land him in hot water. For instance, after entertaining a camp follower one night, he was informed by a soldier who saw her leave that he had been “peppered.”

Sea Biscuit was aghast, but he took matters into his own hands. He opened a bottle of Jack Daniel's and poured the contents over his genitals. He bellowed for 10 minutes and performed something that looked like the rumba, then pronounced himself cured.

But Sea Biscuit had a hearty constitution, which is perhaps why he suffered the trip overseas better than anyone else on the ship. During the entire thirty-two-day journey, Sea Biscuit seemed to be the only one of us unaffected by the bad food, pitching waves and ever-present vomit. While most of us battled bravely to keep from adding to the pool of slop, Sea Biscuit splashed around, slapping ailing soldiers on the back and attempting to cheer them up.

He once came across four GIs tossing their cookies into a garbage can. They were all bent over pretty far and the sight wasn't lost on Sea Biscuit.

“Quit eating out of those garbage pails,” he bellowed. “You're no better than the rest of us. Go on up and eat the regular food!”

Not every journey was an easy one for Sea Biscuit. While training in Fort Jackson, S.C., the company was often put on alert. “This is an alert,” the loudspeaker would crackle, “be ready to evacuate in twenty minutes.” More often than not, these were simply false alarms.

One night, the announcement came over and Sea Biscuit, convinced it was another false alarm, jumped into a pair of boots without bothering to put on socks. We were forced to hike 35 miles that night. Sea Biscuit's feet, by the end of the trek, could best be described by the word "pulpy" but he never uttered a word of complaint.

It was Sea Biscuit who was later ordered to pack up the records in headquarters (somewhere in North Africa) and mail them to Ullo, the Adjutant in Washington, before the German command could get hold of them. I saw him put old shoes, empty tuna fish cans and whatever else he could lay his hands on into the bottom of the pile then plop the records on top of these. They were shipped to Ullo, the Adjutant, whoever he was. The boxes are probably still packed up in a warehouse in one of the Capitol buildings.

One of the tastiest, most delightful sandwiches I ever ate was an onion sandwich. The food was bad on the ship, but I could eat it. I got the reputation for being a walking garbage can. I learned to eat anything and sleep anywhere. One GI just couldn't stomach the food. He'd say, "Hey, Abe, I'll give you a dollar if you let me watch you eat."

The great onion sandwich almost got us court-martialed. Someone broke into the ship's cold storage and stole a half-bushel of onions and six loaves of bread. We made sandwiches. "Nectar of the gods," someone moaned. After the awful food we'd suffered, it was like eating a steak sandwich with pepper and onions, only better. When it was discovered someone swiped the onions, an announcement came over the loudspeaker. "Will whoever stole the onions and bread please report to the captain immediately." No one knew who did it, and this annoyed the high command. An order went out. The thieves, if caught, would be court-martialed and tossed into the brig . . . all over a few onions and six loaves of bread.

We were one of hundreds of ships in a convoy. Small destroyers would dart in and out, protecting us. Some dropped depth charges five hundred feet from our boat. It was great to see so many boats protecting us. Casablanca was dead ahead. Big naval guns would cut loose, twenty-five miles from the shores of North Africa, softening up the harbor.

When we arrived, we scampered down rope ladders and waded to shore or took small barges, anything that floated. The site we saw in the harbor made us want to cry. The *Jean Barte*, pride of the French Navy, had a hole in its side the size of a house. Several submarines looked like beached whales, out of action. We couldn't understand it, but the Vichy French government was sympathetic to the German command and they fired on our own troops. One contingent, we were told, which splashed ashore before us, was wiped out and hundreds of Americans were killed.

After thirty-two days on the troop ship, I met a soldier from my hometown of Wayland, New York. He was Harry Davis and we said hello just as we climbed down the rope ladder. We never saw each other in Africa.

The native population welcomed us with open arms.

Somewhere in Africa

Although the planetary holocaust known as World War II has long subsided, flag wavers should not forget to cheer the unsung malaria fighters—variously called “Mosquito Chasers,” “Bug Snatchers,” and the “Vampire Crew.” Armed only with test tubes and microscopes, their job was to make equatorial regions habitable for fighting men.

Mosquito men tirelessly hunted the man-loving *Anopheles gambiae*, carrier of the microbe which caused the most dangerous form of malaria known, and also a spreader of elephantiasis. Natives worked among the soldiers and, since nearly 100 percent were infected, they formed a natural reservoir for malaria and constituted a real problem.

So the Bug Snatchers turned into Vampire Men and took blood smears of all suspects to determine which villages should be cleaned up. Each native had his finger pricked with a needle. A large drop of blood was then collected on a glass slide, stained and microscopically examined for the presence of death-dealing organisms. The Vampire Crew trekked from village to village searching for African blood, which they found was teeming with malarial microbes. No guns were carried to persuade the natives—just candy and cigarettes which was used as “dashes” for establishing proper diplomatic relations with the head men.

At first, extracting blood from the natives was only slightly easier than getting it from the proverbial stone. The finger-pricking process usually led to a mild riot among the aborigines. Puzzled soldiers stood in the skin-scorching sun, pinching one

grimy finger after another, while all around them milled a semi-naked gang of adolescent boys who kicked up the dust, played hide-and-seek behind one another, eyed the blood-fetching needle curiously and jabbered taunts at the victim of the moment.

With women and girls, it was usually necessary to adopt a strong-arm strategy, going from hut to hut and arguing for about a half an hour. When a soldier prepared to sample the blood of one native belle, she suddenly resorted to biting, hair-pulling, eye-gouging and even kicking below the belt. At the crucial moment, she jerked her hand away and the Vampire Man painfully jabbed his own finger. He tried again. This time she bit a chunk out of the soldier's back. A third trial brought results and a surprised "oh" from the feisty patient.

After moving eastward to Algiers, we then got the order to pack up, get on board the ship and head for West Africa. They didn't say where. Word got out that we were to go to Liberia and protect Firestone's one million acres of rubber trees. The German command had a good idea: the Japanese army had cut off the Dutch supply of rubber and the Germans knew if they could capture Firestone's plantations, the Allies would be licked. An Army travels on rubber.

The Germans had established a foothold in Liberia. Our mission: get them out and keep the rubber trees producing latex for the Allies. Living in a steaming jungle was difficult. No hot running water, no electricity, just plenty of mosquitoes and reptiles.

Snakes and Snake Men

To live in Western Africa in the 1940s was to live with snakes. There were more than forty known species in Liberia at the time and we learned to get along with the most common of them: cobras, mambas, vipers and adders. We didn't always like them but, considering troops elsewhere were ducking Nazi gunfire and Kamikaze air attacks, we knew we had little about which to complain.

Among the most poisonous and ubiquitous was the black-hooded cobra. We killed a nine-foot "Black Mamba" near our mess area one morning. It had all the common characteristics: the black, heavily built body with yellowish-pink bands; the broad head; the short tail and, of course, the poisonous fangs. This snake's bite can cause instant death.

The mamba is chiefly a night prowler, although it's not uncommon to encounter one at dusk, or even during the day, near a village camp. When disturbed, the mamba rears up and expands its hood, preparing to attack. If the intruder isn't within biting distance, the mamba can expectorate its deadly venom.

Cobras seemed to be everywhere. Near the river was the black mamba's cousin, the white mamba. While less vicious, it was still deadly poisonous. Fortunately, it was also rare. We were always on guard against the various tree cobras, but even more common were the banded cobras, which grew to two or three feet long and could often be seen swimming in various streams. Green mambas were particularly numerous and particularly dangerous. Whether coiling in thick brush or slithering along palm

trees, they were capable of attacking without warning—especially during mating season. In fact, bites on the face and neck were exceedingly common in Western Africa, owing to the large number of fanged tree-dwellers.

With snakes in such abundant supply, bites were inevitable. Some natives cured bites by taking palm leaves, grinding them up and mixing them with white clay. The resulting paste was then applied to the wound. When time was of the essence, as it often was in such matters, the victim would simply be given a few palm leaves to chew while rescuers attempted to suck the poison out of the wound. (Rubber condoms were often used over the mouth, so the would-be rescuer wouldn't take in any venom through, say, cracks in his lips.)

Cobras were far from the least of our worries, snake-wise. Puff adders, Gabon vipers, horned vipers abounded, "two-headed snakes," which were actually 18 to 20-inch-long worms that had markings on their tails, which resembled their heads. If it crawled, slithered, hissed or coiled, odds are it was within shouting distance of our camp.

The Army Medical Corps eventually provided safety kits for use against snake bites. They came in moisture-proof, plastic cylinders and included a tourniquet, a small knife to make incisions around the wound, a pump to draw off venom-tainted blood, three types of pump openings to apply on different parts of the body (depending on the location of the bite), two ammonia capsules to act as a stimulant against nervous shock, a pair of iodine swabs to disinfect the wound, and two boric bandages.

Of course, what were nuisances to us soldiers could be a livelihood to the locals. Take Bo Bo, a thirteen-year-old native boy, who routinely captured snakes measuring longer in feet than he did in years.

Bo Bo lived in "Talking Charlie," a small village near the military reservation which soldiers often would visit during their down time. Small, shiny kids dressed in little more than beaded

g-strings would run to greet us. Young or not, they were always hitting us up for cigarettes: "Gimme smook, goo fran. We show you village." Old women would sit cross-legged, smoking clay pipes. But the young "Tee Tees" with plenty of sizzling tropical oomph, and bodies as smooth as panther skin, danced and shimmered before us. The music was furnished by an official "drum major," a fourteen-year-old boy whose muscles bulged as he went through the Gene Krupa motions. He was often accompanied by a smaller kid who whacked away on an old dehydrated potato can.

One day, we got to the settlement just in time to see a group of villagers dancing around Bo Bo.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Bo Bo catch big snake," an "armyized" native informed us. "Make mighty fine chop."

"Is it dead?" I asked.

"Yah, him dead lots."

We proceeded to find that thirteen-year-old Bo Bo had, on this occasion, killed a fifteen-foot-long python. I had seen circus snakes but, compared to Bo Bo's prize, they were mere angle worms.

Bo Bo captured snakes not only for food, but for the skins, which he would often sell to soldiers. His hunting methods were simple yet fascinating. Bo Bo knew that snakes have certain pathways in the jungle, so he would insert a bamboo pole into the ground on one side of the trail, pull the other end over until it formed an arch, and fasten to it a noose made of sturdy jungle vine. The weight of the snake, as it crawled through the noose, would release a trap. The pole would then straighten out and the hapless reptile would be hurtled into the air, where it would dangle and fiercely thrash about. Once the snake tired itself out, Bo Bo would carefully break its tail (he feared the tails more than the jaws), then cut off its head with a crude but sharp machete and proudly drag his conquest home.

Pythons were a regular food source in more ways than one: their eggs were considered a tasty delicacy in many natives' diets. Their meat has the flavor of pork, especially when cooked in papaya leaves.

On the day of Bo Bo's big catch, the village leader told us we could stay for lunch, but it would cost us a pack of American "smook." We forked over the smokes but declined the invitation. *The next guy I hear complaining about GI food, I remember thinking, will get a swift kick in the pants.*

Aside from Bo Bo, the snakes' biggest fear was, believe it or not, ants. Before attempting to devour any animal it has captured, most snakes will encircle a large area to make sure no ants are around to molest it while it's digesting its victim (a process that, depending on the prey, can take weeks).

As to the nuisance of ants, the snakes and the GIs were, for once, in agreement. In fact, no animal in those parts could cope with a band of driver ants, which would often take a notion to pass through the mess hall in our camp. Fire was the only way to disperse them, particularly when they showed up in waves a foot wide.

We had occasion, now and then, to become acquainted with the practices of the mysterious African Snake Societies. The purpose of these societies was to familiarize members with snake habits and teach them how to handle the critters without being bitten. Members learned to catch and tame any kind of snake, except the spitting cobra. Membership was open only to men and was signaled by use of the left hand. Snake men always used their left hands when shaking hands with each other and for every other snake-related activity. The penalty for using the right hand was a fine of 10 kola nuts. Present-day Rotary clubs have adopted this practice of fining members for odd transgressions.

Snake Society members could come in handy. One day at Bassa Point, where natives were clearing brush, a Firestone employee noticed workers scurrying away madly from a pile of

debris. A snake had been discovered in the thickets. One small boy—a society member—did not panic. He reached in and slowly pulled out a deadly, eleven-foot-long black mamba just as easily as a robin would pull a worm from the ground.

The snake people never revealed their trade secrets, so their methods remained mystifying. Ordinarily, before catching a snake, a snake man would rub the leaves of a climbing fern in his hands, then smear his arms. This was said to make the snakes succumb quickly. The snake men would reach into holes and fearlessly withdraw reptiles by the tail, tap them on the head a couple of times, then grab them by the neck. At least that's the way they did it with most snakes.

The Gabon viper could not be caught by the tail but, rather, had to be seized immediately by the neck. The handlers would chew leaves of the sei plant, then spit onto the snake's head, or apply the substance with a quick tap of the finger. The juice put the snake to sleep, unless too much was used. Then it killed the reptile.

If snakes were to be caught, but not killed, the snake men would mix the leaves of another plant with palm oil and rub this ointment around the trunk of a tree. The snake men then shout "Gbaka" and the snake falls out of the tree and is easily killed. Or not so easily killed, depending on the weapons available. If a stick was handy, the snake would be clubbed, like the "fat broad" does in the comic strip "B.C." No sticks? No problem. The snake man rubs a mixture on his hands, grabs the snake by the tail and flails it against the ground.

Once treated with sei, the snakes could be fairly easily handled. They seemed tamed, drugged, and wouldn't attempt to escape. They wouldn't even hiss. Then it was the work of a moment for the snake man to pick up a snake, wrap it around his head or even bathe it. (Who wants a dirty snake coiling around his head?)

Snake men were not to be crossed. They had long memories and ways of getting even.

If a snake man saw a villager making palm oil, for instance, and asked for a taste but was refused, woe to the palm oiler. The next time that person was making palm oil, the snake man dropped one or two buds of "lolo" into the oil. The buds spoiled the oil by keeping it from separating.

And should a woman deign to criticize a snake man, she'll have more to suffer than bad palm oil. The snake man would remove the leaves from a young shoot of a plant called "fai," saying "Gbaka" for each individual leaf. The shoot of another plant is stripped in the same manner. A fistful of these leaves are then ground up with ashes and spread on the ground in the spot where the woman is accustomed to urinating. The rest of the preparation the snake man ties in a stalk of plantain (similar to banana) leaves and adds water. A hole is punched in the bottom of the pocket and the device is hung aloft over the ground ashes. When the mixture drips on the urinating woman, she developed an irritation of the bladder. The theory is, she can do no work if she is constantly running to relieve herself. Sooner or later (usually sooner), she begs the snake man to cure her. He agrees, then secretly retrieves the packet and dries it before a fire. He removes the contents and rubs them on the woman's belly. She is cured—not only of constant trips to the bathroom but of mouth-
ing off.

The snake men also had a devious way of taking care of real enemies. They would hide snake fangs—pointed upward—just beneath the surface of the ground again, near the spot where the victim is known to urinate. One bare-footed step on the fangs and the results are the same as if an actual snake bite were suffered.

We always make certain to stay on the good side of the members of the African Snake Societies.

Unfortunately, snake men weren't always on hand when the need to catch a snake arose. In these cases, capturing puff adders and yellow cobras became the work of a unit of the South Africa

Medical Corps. The unit would make daily patrols into the ravines, the thick bush, and along the river banks seeking out the poisonous reptiles. Why? The venom was needed to insure enough anti-snake bite serum was available.

The manufacture of such antidotes was neither easy nor expedient. Once the snakes were caught, they'd be milked for venom in the usual way: having their fangs pressed into a rubber sheath over a measuring glass. After the thin, clear liquid dried, it was sent to the South African Institute of Medical Research, where horses would be injected with a mixture of the two types of venom—nerve-poison from cobras and ringhals, and blood-poison from puff adders—in gradually increasing doses for about seven months. The horse's blood would then be drawn off and the serum would be separated out and shipped to the tropical battle fronts. I was never certain exactly how this all worked, but it saved lives and that was all that was important.

I Wore Many Hats with Task Force #5889

Besides training recruits, I was also assigned a job with a Captain Grice, on loan from Pan Am. He was a great pilot and he enjoyed working for the army because he didn't take orders from anyone. He was given a small amphibious plane and working with him was a real experience. His plane was nicknamed "Billy O" after our mascot chimp Billy O.

We would start out early in the morning. He sucked on cigars and they made me want to upchuck. Captain Grice would fly up and down the coast and in the interior. Our job was to hire husky males to work for the U.S. Army for a dollar a day. We would land in a river, walk into a village, and pick up recruits. Captain Grice did the flying, I did the physical exams. I'd ask husky males, "You want a job in the Army?" And I would hold up a wad of dollar bills. They were legal tender in Liberia.

I would take the candidates into a shack and ask them to strip (usually all they wore was a bandanna over their genitals). I'd ask them to show me their genitals, which invariably caused them to snicker. At first, this job caused me to toss my cookies inside the shack. Some sex organs were honeycombed and the smell would gag a maggot. Their bodies had the aroma of a leather harness soaked in sweat and urine. I would examine their feet, ears, eyes, nose, rectum, teeth, the whole works.

You have to hold a strong constitution when you examine a prospect, especially when you have an empty stomach. If the "recruit" passed his physical, we gave him a tag and would transport him to headquarters where he was trained.

Our Plane Goes Down

I was never keen on flying, especially in a “duck” like the army provided. Captain Grice liked to fly low over the jungle just to see the trees wave. It was scary to me, especially after we had just lost sixty beautiful America WACS. They boarded a two-engine transport. I hugged and shook hands with all of them. One was a model from Chicago. She had migraine headaches, and I used to massage her head and it helped her. Their plane was out twenty minutes when a call came in, saying the plane went down either in the jungle or ocean. No one ever heard from them.

Billy O, our amphibious plane was cruising along about 200 feet above the jungle. Suddenly one of the engines started coughing. Captain Grice, a civilian Pan American pilot on loan to the U.S. Army suspected trouble.

“Abe, we’re gonna try and land in the river below. Hang on!”

He brought the plane down in what later was described as the DU river. Bushes swayed back and forth. The plane glided in the water. Suddenly I heard and felt an underwater “clunk.”

“We hit a log,” Captain Grice shouted. “Get out and go ashore and stay put. I’ve got to get out . . . and fast.”

I scrambled out of the cockpit and stood on a wing, scared white.

“Jump off,” he shouted. “Get off!”

I looked down at the coffee black water. It was laced with snakes, with their heads 2-3 inches above the water.

“I can’t jump in that water,” I shouted. “There are snakes all over.”

“If you don’t get out, none of us will. They’ll never find us!” he warned. “I’ll get this tub fixed and be back to pick you up. Get off!” He then pulled the throttle and started moving off. “Stay put,” he shouted.

The only alternative was to jump into the water, black with organic matter over the years. I was a good swimmer and probably broke swimming speed records going to shore. Was I ever glad I learned to swim in the mucky Marl beds in my hometown of Wayland, N.Y.

I scrambled ashore, shaking with fear. No knife, no gun, no food and no idea where I was, except knowing I was six thousand miles from home and in a jungle without a friend.

At first, I had a good bawl. It was getting dark, probably about four o'clock in the afternoon. Then I got mad. "What in hell am I doing in a dark, snake-ridden jungle without any friend to call on?" The whole world grew darker and darker by the minute. I could hear crazy birds screeching, monkeys chattering, and then the rumble of jungle drums far away in some native village. The biggest fear I had was mosquitoes. They sucked your blood and inoculated you with deadly malaria organisms.

The first night I grabbed and hugged a tree, put my arms around it and I got some sleep standing up. I worried about the food and water shortage. I liked to eat. I hadn't eaten since five o'clock in the morning. I didn't dare to drink the black river water and once caught myself urinating in the cup of my hand to drink my own urine. I read somewhere that's what some people did when desperate. After day one, I found myself getting weaker and started to lose interest in life. Then I'd look at Katy's picture and was buoyed up with extra strength.

I found a narrow jungle path and decided I should take it. Something told me it was the right thing to do, even though Captain Grice had told me not to stray. I was always a religious fellow (kept it to myself and soon I began to remember some of the things I learned in church). Katy and her family were deeply religious people, so I know I had good support. I knew quite a bit about jungle survival because a Captain O'Brien had furnished me with a survival book with edible and poisonous plants. Based

on South American jungles. I had taught classes on jungle survival, so I knew a little about it. My courses in college botany were useless since the material had nothing to do with jungle plants.

I was thankful for the good experience I got at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and Fort Bragg, North Carolina where I had infantry and artillery training. I could scamper up and down obstacle courses with the best of men, so I wasn't ready to give up yet. I even got used to seeing snakes crossing the jungle path. A big green one gave me a scare. It moved slowly across the path. I never saw its head or tail, but its belly was a good three feet.

On my third or fourth day, I got a break. My prayers were answered. Believe it or not, I stumbled into a clearing where I thought I was seeing things. There was a black woman, bare breasted, sifting rice, tossing it into the air and letting the wind blow the chaff off. I pointed to my mouth, saying, "Eat, eat."

Then I thought I was really delirious. The woman walked toward me and said in good English, "You can speak English. I understand." It was a miracle. The lady was a direct descendant of American-Liberians and she knew English. I was fed chicken and rice. She let me get rested up and even took me back to the spot where Captain Grice unloaded me.

Captain Grice came back and picked me up and we went back to Robert Fields. For years I have tried to get back to Captain Grice and thank him personally for coming back after me. And I thanked that black Americo-Liberian lady for also saving my life.

As a result of this, today fifty years later, I have a fetish about drinking water. I hate to see leaky faucets, hesitate to flush toilets. I like the signs I saw in a NYC toilet. "If it's yellow let it mellow, if it's brown flush it down."

Water is so precious, Katy chides me for not flushing the toilet more than I do. Food is another one. I recoil when I see how much food is wasted in restaurants and schools. It would be

good for everyone to go without food and water for a couple of days.

I mention this experience not to show any bravery. I'm just as much of a chicken as the next guy. The whole world knows Lebanese people don't make good soldiers. By nature, they are not belligerent.

A comic once said, if you want an easy job, write a book on Lebanese war heroes. My theory is why fight when you can make a good living selling rugs or running a restaurant. We found that the Germans in Liberia were very friendly with the Lebanese population, and vice versa.

I could eat anything and sleep anywhere, even on a rock pile.

One GI said, "Abe, I'll give you a dollar if you let me watch you eat that chow."

The army made us take atabrine tablets (useless against malaria). And every noon the GIs would say, "Oh boy, atabrine for lunch again." It was bitter stuff and deposited a layer of yellow under your skin. I was so yellow in Grand Central Station in NYC, Katy didn't know who I was.

Tumblers Boost Yanks' Morale

We may have been thousands of miles from the Great White Way and hundreds of miles from a proper movie theater, but we didn't lack for entertainment entirely. Aborigine tumblers could offer U.S. troops a morale-building act, which would have fit in nicely with any circus the world over.

An elaborate organization of painted snake men, the tumblers traveled from base to base, putting on hair-raising, two-hour acts. Dressed in G-strings made of shells and wearing black, monkey-skin caps, the African acrobats performed stunts ranging from ghastly body-bending contortions to throwing a small girl fifteen feet in the air and having her land between two closely-placed, razor-sharp bayonets. So delicate was this knife feat, we were told, the miscalculation of a mere half inch would have meant death for the young girl. (The performers obviously picked up a bit of hucksterism in their travels.)

Tumbling was a delicate and revered act in the African bush, and would-be troupers had to pony up in order to secure an apprenticeship. Beginners would pay a small fee—a bucket of rice, for example, a chicken, a slab of goat meat or a handful of snuff—to learn the profession from the masters.

To avoid calamity during their dangerous exhibitions, the performers rubbed a “medicine” made from snake excrement across their foreheads. In addition, each troupe traveled with its own medicine doctor and, as further insurance against misfortune, a box of live cobras—tokens of good luck—was always

among the props. Whether these precautions appeased the Tumbler Gods, acted as a psychological reinforcement to the performers, or simply made for good showmanship, we never observed any serious injuries during the various displays.

Once the show was over, a small girl would pass the hat—a monkey-skin cap, actually—to collect what were known as “dashes.” The caps would fill with dashes of cigarettes, soap, soap coupons, and tattered comic books. When performing before a local village, the performers were more likely to be paid in handfuls of rice, goats’ heads, chunks of elephant meat or native money—often 16-inch-long twisted pieces of iron.

Like any good band of stage veterans, the tumblers, once the show was over, would pack up their costumes, grab their snakes and head to the next village. Well, most traveling acts don’t have *snakes*, but you get the idea. And like good performers of then and now, the tumblers were always available for free-lance gigs. Often, when a paramount chief or some other such VIP of the bush died, the snake men were hired as professional mourners. They would perform for days, until the chief was buried. Likewise, their services were often sought for weddings, or when a village chief felt like putting on a dance for the spirits.

The only downside, as far as the troops were concerned, was that, sometimes, the pandemonium would last for several days and the incessant beating of the tom-toms would keep us tossing in our sleep. Eventually, we grew used to the initially eerie booming, as well as the occasional screeching that accompanied it.

When not performing, the tumblers were no more wild than Halloween pranksters. They certainly had American appetites when it came to candy bars and cigarettes, which they would smoke down to nothing, risking burned lips. And like many of the native Africans we encountered, they were smitten by American soap.

The snake men seemed to take great enjoyment in performing and providing entertainment. They did not know there was a global war being waged, although the presence of so many American troops in their back yard surely gave them a hunch something was in the air. Something, that is, other than the young girl who would land safely (thanks to the medicine men and cobras?) between the bayonet blades every time.

Ever See A 300-Pound Yam?

Agriculture in the sun-drenched, equatorial region of Africa was not much different in the 1940s than from what it was a thousand years earlier. But despite the fact that natives of the time were unfamiliar with plows, or 5-10-5 fertilizer, they managed to grow their two main crops—rice and cassava—exceptionally well. Cassava is a starchy, tuberous root resembling a yam. Tapioca is made from it. The plant grows about 6 feet high and looks like a poinsettia.

In years past, during times of inter-tribal warfare, cassava was used to make a type of bullet. The pulp was cooked, beaten and formed into pellets after drying in the sun. These bullets could be propelled either by slingshots or gunpowder. During our stay on the continent, cassava was believed useful as a “magic bullet” of another sort. Natives used the plant for checking gonorrhea. They soaked the roots in palm wine and drank the concoction. But cassava was used mostly as food called “Dumboy” or “Foo-Foo.” The former is a rubbery mass of dough, roughly the same consistency—and tastiness—as a bath sponge. “Foo-Foo,” on the other hand, was slightly more edible. This was made by pounding the root with a large wooden mortar, and serving the resulting, pasty mass with palm oil (or, if one wasn’t in luck, fish gravy).

The problem with the foul-tasting native foods was avoiding them when visiting nearby villages. Turning down a hospitable offer of chow was a sure way to disappoint or worse, anger—the chief. And, as if the grub weren’t bad enough, it

was sometimes offered from the same bowl scrawny chickens or mangy goats were eating out of only moments before.

Chewing "Dumboy" is like jawing your way through molasses-covered taffy, so the natives would add "palaver" oil—a mixture of monkey or elephant meat with a dish of okra and blazing hot peppers. We quickly learned that the local method of eating "Dumboy" was to swallow chunks of it without chewing. Well greased with palm oil, it slides down the throat and hits the walls of the stomach, which commences to complain. Savvy GIs always pretended to enjoy the dish, lest they give offense to their hosts. About the only thing that can be said in favor of "Dumboy," is that it tastes better than goat's eyeballs, which one hapless soldier was once offered.

The torrential downpours that drench western Africa made farming in the rain-soaked region difficult. It wasn't uncommon to see five inches of rain fall in a single day, and the annual total routinely topped 200 inches. There was no "summer" or "winter" in this area. The seasons were referred to as "wet" and "dry." The "wet" season ran from April through November, with a brief respite in July or August, which natives took advantage of by clearing land for a second planting.

Unlike in America, women did most of the farming in Africa. They tilled the soil, harvested the crop, and still cooked all the meals. All the males did was clear the brush and smoke clay pipes. It was not uncommon to see women with babies strapped to their backs as they chopped stumps, pulled weeds and shooed birds away from the crops.

Although the African soil teems with insects, they seldom infest the crops. In any rice field, for example, ten-foot-high ant hills can be seen. But the ants, while they would swarm through our mess tent on occasion, never bothered the rice. Not that this lent any sense of comfort to the African farmers. They still had to contend with demons and small animals.

The spirits seemed easy enough to dissuade. A bamboo mat or a bunch of palm leaves tied together and placed at the entrance of the patch was thought to do the trick. The animal intruders—such as antelope, bush cats and guinea pigs—required a little more ingenuity and extermination. The natives would enclose their plots with a solid wooden fence made of sticks stuck into the ground. At intervals, a small opening was allowed in the fence. This is where they set a trap—a crude and cruel gadget with a dual purpose: keeping the animals out of the crops and providing meat for the table. The weight of the animal, as it stepped on the wicker platform, would release a vine cord which sent a 200-pound log crashing onto the doomed intruder.

These tricks were important. Agriculture was the natives' chief means of livelihood. Around any native hut one would find at least thirty-five fruits and vegetables growing wild. Among the more plentiful were peanuts, bananas, pineapples, eggplants, cucumbers, and corn. Irish cobbles did not grow here but yams were known to weigh up to 300 pounds. That's right, 300 pounds!

The corn ear worm had made its way to Liberia and this gave us a chance to experiment in a native's corn patch. With an oil can, light motor oil was squirted onto ears of corn shortly after the silk first appeared. The oil was directed into the silk channel to form a barrier and keep the ear worms out. It worked. Americans also taught natives how to soak tobacco leaves in water and spray cucumber plants for sap-sucking and leaf-chewing beetles.

Liberia was known chiefly at this time for its coffee and the great Firestone Rubber plantation. With the supply of rubber cut off from the other great rubber-producing regions during World War II, the role Liberia played in producing this vital product for American war materials cannot be understated.

One American officer also recognized the value of the mahogany in Liberia and made an effort to export some home. There was plenty of mahogany in the republic, so much that

natives burned it. The Signal Corps used mahogany poles to support telephone wire since it was so hard it kept termites from causing damage. Some of the linemen complained about this. Since the poles were so hard, their climbing apparatus often failed to dig in.

Billy O Helped GI Joe

The first time we saw him, he was wailing like a lost child over the body of his 150-pound mother, who was slain by native hunters. To save him from a like fate, we traded two tins of Vienna sausages and a can of Spam for him. That's how it happened that Billy O became the first chimpanzee ever to join the United States Army. He also became, we claimed, the greatest morale builder in the history of the American soldier in the jungles of Africa. No one but soldiers who worked, ate, and slept with Billy O could understand how his antics helped us through two years of the mind-destroying monotony of camp life in the grimy African wilderness.

Overnight Billy O became a completely egoistic GI Joe who refused to swap his rank in the Army for all the bananas on the continent. Though seldom belligerent, he would occasionally, out of nostalgia for his jungle days, sharpen his powerful molars on a native's gam. He loved to chase native girls just to hear them scream.

Army to the core, Billy O was the first to fall out for reveille and always at the head of the chow line. GIs have dubbed Army coffee "battery acid," but it was nectar to the chimp. He couldn't begin the day until he had drunk a quart or so. Two quarts enlarged his belly to the size of a basketball and made him uncomfortable in the five-and-dime panties a modest serviceman's wife had sent him.

Billy O developed a fanatical fondness for jeeps. He would run a mile to ride twenty feet in one. When a jeep whizzed past

him, he would sputter his own brand of blasphemies. Frustration usually caused him to grind his teeth, pull his thin lips, and emit spine-chilling cries.

The cracker-barrel primate was also a great hitchhiker, his method being to scamper up a soldier's leg and plunk his feet into the man's back pockets. He preferred human companionship to that of his girlfriend, Josephine, particularly at night. Since he detested sleeping alone, he would make the rounds, inspecting one tent after another until he found someone willing to let him park; then he would say thanks with a quick "oof, oof." With one arm wrapped around the GI's leg for safety's sake, Billy O slept on his back, snored heavily, and gave even the toughest soldier the willies with his nightmares.

He was a clean character. Every Sunday morning he willingly submitted to his bath, hands cupped over his basketball belly while rich GI soap was applied. Chattering contentedly, he awaited the end of the scrubbing, while a GI barber would trim his wiry locks and dust him with alluring after-shave powder. T/4 Frank Neri of Syracuse, New York, cut GI hair and used the same tools on the chimp.

Billy O became our mascot. Like all chimps, he longed for human affection, cried like a baby, and trusted everyone. This closeness should not be surprising. Chimps and humans share more than 98 percent of their DNA. Many times, a GI would moan, "Why can't we have a chimp for a commanding officer?" Chimpanzees are endangered; only about 200,000 are thought to remain in Africa. Virtually all those discovered along the smuggling routes from Africa to exotic pet dealers and in unscrupulous laboratories are infants, captured by poachers who kill the entire family if it tries to defend the baby. Baby chimps are sold for as little as \$20 to someone who knows they'll bring \$20,000 or more in America, Europe, or the Mid-East.

The comfort Billy O gave our troops was worth thousands of dollars in morale-building alone. Not many people know what

a pleasure it is to raise a chimp. But one sad day, Billy O scampered up a pole and seized two 13,000-volt wires. As he lay on the ground, pitifully burned, his eyes moved around to each of us. He seemed to be saying, "Well, fellas, my show is over." With sadness, we gave our friend a military funeral.

Americans Taught Them to Kill

An agreement dated March 31, 1942, between the Liberian government and Uncle Sam, included the provision that the U.S. would reorganize the feeble and corrupt Liberian Frontier Force, which consisted of anywhere from 600 to 1,000 troops. An officers training school based on the infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia, was conducted by the U.S. government to train a corps of officers for the expanded Liberian Frontier Force.

This strategic rubber-producing republic had long seen its need for self-protection. Only a short time before, when Dakar was in Vichy hands, Germany had designs on taking over the country. In 1940, when all democracies were still asleep, Liberia suddenly found herself honeycombed with Nazi spies and Axis sympathizers whose efforts to create an effective Nazi-styled youth movement resulted in an attempt to overthrow the government—and assassinate the president. The skeleton Liberian Frontier Force was called out and squelched the plot.

Besides running the Barclay Training Center in Monrovia, the U.S. furnished—through Lend-Lease—clothing, equipment, and supplies necessary for the operations of the school. To secure candidates, it was necessary to secure the country. We rounded up prospective students and administered mental and physical examinations. I was detailed to devise a mental test, which I did, on par with a sixth-grade education in America. It contained multiple-choice questions, which dealt with simplified Army classification problems. These tests were given to prospective students, including officers and noncommissioned officers

(NCOs) of the Liberian Frontier Force, all of whom were put on an equal basis without distinction to rank or grade. The students (100 in the first class) were organized as an infantry rifle company with two platoons of four squads each. Each student was permanently assigned to a squad, but for training purposes, they were rotated. My part in reorganizing the fighting force taught me much about the poverty of the country, as well as its ineffective educational system. Some of the questions that stumped the Liberian college graduates who wanted to become officers were:

Question: What is a machine gun?

- (a) Weapon (b) Decoration (c) Part of an auto (d) Toy

Out of 150 who took the test, half maintained it was a toy.

Question: Who are Americo-Liberians?

- (a) Settlers from America (b) European settlers (c) Gold Coast settlers (d) Members of the America Labor Union

A great many said (d) was the correct answer.

Question: Which of the following is required for good health?

- (a) Enlistment in the Army (b) Frequent baths (c) Know-how to drive a truck (d) Know-how to speak English

The majority insisted it was (a)—enlistment in the Army.

Oddly enough, the question that most often stumped them was:

Question: Elephantiasis is

- (a) A small elephant (b) A Liberian beetle (c) A part of an elephant's tail (d) a disease

Most of them said elephantiasis is a small elephant. At least 25 percent of the officers and NCOs who came to camp for

instruction were found to have elephantiasis organisms (filarial worms) in their blood and didn't know it.

The well-known trick question—which weighs more, 10 pounds of feathers or 10 pounds of Liberian bananas?—should have been too easy to answer, yet most of those taking the test stumbled over it.

It was thus evident that Liberia's education system at the time was pitifully weak and somewhat ill-patterned. This is not to say that the nation's schools hadn't done a good job—they had, considering the odds they were up against. There were many things the country needed to worry about before building up its army.

The pay incentive in the Liberian system was too low. Hence, the cream did not respond. A private got three dollars a month. On several occasions, the U.S. Army spent hundreds of dollars searching for officer candidates in such isolated places as Sinoe, where it was necessary to land an amphibious plane in a rock-studded river. Upon arrival, we found no applicants on hand despite sending out notice weeks in advance informing the townspeople we were coming. We flew to Cape Palmas several times to secure candidates and often, after arriving, the superintendent told us to “wait a while.”

On one occasion, it seemed that Liberian President-elect William V.S. Tubman, the American minister, the Liberian secretary of war, and others had enjoyed a blow-out of a party in the county building. We were told we couldn't start operations until the next day, for it required a platoon of men to first clean the aftermath. After the building was straightened up, there were no chairs or tables for the applicants to use while taking their examinations. So they sent the candidates out looking for chairs. Over three-quarters of them never returned. Thus, seeking out legitimate officer candidates was often a wild goose chase, costing good American money and risking American lives. Col. Moses N. Grant, commanding officer of the Liberian Frontier Force,

told us the president-elect had a touch of "influenza" the day after the big bash. What he actually meant was that the rheumy-eyed bigwig had whiskey fever—and that didn't care whether the school functioned or not.

From the very outset, the Liberian officer candidate school was a fizzle. Even so, it was 100 percent better than it would have been had the Americo-Liberians themselves operated it. The Liberian white-collared brass never liked the idea of white officers taking over. They wanted to select their own material, using their own methods. Had they had their way, there would have been no examinations—bribes would have done the trick. Even President Edwin Barclay always wanted to have his hand in the pie, and he and his staff gummed the works often. This was due partly to the U.S. government, which never made it clear where the line was to be drawn. The American general in command never knew exactly what his sphere of influence was. President Tubman, it must be admired, proved to be more cooperative and understanding with the U.S. Army. Under Barclay, minor arguments were created with Army personnel, requiring the immediate services of the general.

Captain Russ, a smart, harrumphing Liberian officer, never could get over the idea of white officers running the school, and he did little to hide his feelings of contempt and resentment toward the staff. He constantly wrangled with the American commandant. In fact, the first day school started, the American officer hit a stone wall over the "food problem" and "location of the dispensary." President Barclay, who was about as popular as malaria, did not want U.S. Army food to be issued to officer candidates since it would establish for the country an "artificial standard."

As a result, the candidates were fed two rations daily, which was far too little for sustenance in view of the vigorous training program they went through.

Many Liberians felt that the American Army was going to take over the country. This suspicion was received as good news by some, bad news by others. This indicated that the country needed an overhauling. One man who was qualified to do a good job was Col. Moses N. Grant, who had enlisted as a cadet on February 22, 1941. Grant was trained under Col. Charles Young, who reorganized the Frontier Force once before under the "American Regime." Grant was qualified to be president of Liberia.

Generally speaking, the Liberian officers were too conceited to conduct the school as it should have been. One candidate, for example, who took the simplified classification test received a good mark—as any American sixth-grader would have. He felt insulted because the regular U.S. Army classification test was not administered to him. We eventually satisfied him by giving him the test. He failed it with a 61.

Several Liberian candidates proved to be untrustworthy and caused considerable annoyance to the U.S. Army. Three of the officer candidates went AWOL and were later discovered by American officers in Monrovia. They denied being away from camp. They were ousted, but President Barclay put up a big howl and wanted the men reinstated. The American command laid down the law and the candidates stayed out. Barclay wanted the candidates readmitted because one was his nephew and the other was a relative of some government bigwig.

Thus, the soldiers and officers who helped train the Liberians had plenty of headaches. Some Americans groaned that they would rather be in combat than train these people. One soldier got into trouble for shooting at a Liberian officer candidate who carried his rifle as if he were hunting ducks. "Hey! Where in hell do you think you are?" the American demanded, "In the Liberian Army?" The Liberian turned white with wrath. He also turned the American in for insubordination. The U.S. troop was dismissed for "too much American brutality."

Another candidate's feelings were hurt one afternoon when an American medical officer entered the administration building of the Liberian Frontier Force and found a Liberian, feet cocked on the desk, fast asleep. The American captain rudely nudged him, thinking he was a janitor, and handed the scoffer his raincoat for proper dispensation. The Liberian cocked back in alarm. "Do you know who I am?" he sputtered. "I'm Colonel Whisnant, aide-de-camp, and I belong to the Frontier Force." Then he added, "You have offended me. It is outrageous . . . and I shall report you immediately." The American shrugged him off, as if he were a Boy Scout.

The Land Where Monkeys Vote

Liberia was not only a tiny republic situated on the rain-lashed West African coast, it was also a country where monkeys could vote for president. At least they could, and did, in the 1940s.

Strangely, monkeys in Liberia had more political influence than women. By law, the so-called weaker sex was not allowed to vote. However, any dissatisfied female was able to hurdle this obstacle by letting monkeys do the voting for her.

The presidential election of May 4, 1943, offered one of the purest exhibitions of political chicanery in franchise history. Women led dressed-up monkeys to the polls. On the chattering primates' furry backs were ballots for the honorable William V.S. Tubman. At the polls, the ballots were ripped off and cast into the ballot box. Thus, Tubman was elected to the highest office in the land and became perhaps the first man ever elected president with the aid of votes cast by a flea-bitten monkeys.

Anything goes, was the attitude in Liberia. The stark power-politics of this American-inspired republic reeked to high heaven. The government, while supposedly a replica of the American system, teemed with creeping forms of legalistic fungus that stunted the growth of the republic Uncle Sam had launched more than a century before.

In Liberia, there was but one major political party: the Whigs. Opposing the Whigs was a timid little group called the Democrats. The most that could be said for the Democrats was that they had nuisance value and a spunky little organ called *The Weekly Mirror*.

The Whig party made defeat an impossibility prior to the presidential election. They printed 400,000 ballots for Mr. Tubman. The opposing party—"due to a paper shortage"—was allowed just a few hundred ballots.

Anyone who voted on the Democrat ticket had to be a brave person indeed. Members of the Liberian Army, which American troops had trained for modern warfare and equipped with the latest American arms, were paid to employ the strong-arm strategy, and to terrify natives into voting for the Whig ticket.

Voting was undertaken in job lots. Fistfuls of Whig votes were cast in ballot boxes, and on each ballot was a mythical name such as Weany No. 1, Weany No. 2, Small Boy No. 8, Joe Irons, Jimmie Irons, Cheaphas Zinc, ZiZi, etc. Many names were inspired by English-speaking natives in office.

Mercenary Liberians didn't mind voting. It paid off. One native, hired to vote on the Whig ticket, must have set some sort of ballot-casting speed record; he was found to have voted 162 times in less than two hours. One village, Cheesemanburg, which had two small huts and two families, polled 1,200 votes for the Whigs. In Upper Buchanan, Bassa County, with a voting population of 32, more than 8,500 ballots were cast for the Whigs.

Near the military area where the American infantry and service troops were stationed, one town of twelve native huts and a maximum voting population of 40 generated 5,100 votes for the Whigs and only seven for the Democrats. In Kakata, eligible voters numbering not more than 200 were augmented by 300 hinterland aborigines not legally qualified to vote. The latter was sent down by the district commissioners and chiefs, who threatened reprisals if any of their people voted on the Democratic line.

This gives some indication of the decadent political situation in Liberia at the time. "It's a good thing Liberian politics are so screwy and corrupt," said one American soldier. "We have to have something funny to keep our morale up."

There was constant political intrigue—and bribery for the position of commissioner in Liberia—just as there was back-door chicanery for office jobs in the capital city of Monrovia. Most of the American troops who worked with Liberian officials felt there weren't more than a baker's dozen honest men in the entire republic. The officials in charge did little to improve the situation.

An example of the way corrupt politics worked there: A man from South America came to Liberia and was employed by our Military Police Department. He killed a Liberian officer in a bloody and savage knife battle. Then he attempted to slay some American soldiers. He was wounded in a gun fight, which should have killed him. After all this, the Liberian officials said he could not be punished by the American Army. So the South American was placed under arrest in the city jail in Monrovia. A few days later, he bribed his way out.

Liberia has been called the land of rogues. Those of us who served in the republic saw evidence supporting this statement. When a district commissioner left Kolahun after two years in office, it took 600 boys to carry away the chattels he had stolen from the people. Another commissioner left the Sanoquelle District with 3,000 satchels of loot, and he had been in office only a year.

The Frontier Force, the Liberian soldiers, were constant looters. One populous town, Beliyela, was deserted after the Liberian army looted and plundered it. Several formerly vibrant towns on the main routes of travel were abandoned, and the populations had dispersed to small groups in remote, inaccessible locations. Many natives who had been treated brutally, or taxed heavily for a road they never saw, fled to Sierra Leone and to the French side.

Part of the problem stemmed from the power structure. There were about 20,000 Americo-Liberians (descendants of the immigrants from America) in the 1940s, plus another 80,000

locals dwelling along the coast who were far from civilized. About a million aborigines lived in the nation's interior.

The Americo-Liberians ruled through an oligarchic form of government. They were the ones who were chiefly responsible for the miserable plight of the natives. They were the elite who taxed natives to support a government that promised to provide education and develop industry and agriculture, but never delivered on those promises. They were the ones who felt superior and remained aloof from their indigenous bush brethren.

President Tubman, an earnest man of humble origin, was not Ivory-soap pure. But he was far more suited to rule Liberia than was his shrewd and arrogant predecessor, Barclay. Tubman was a strikingly unconventional type of person. He was slow-witted, but he worked hard and was admired by the populace.

Barclay nearly lost his republic—and his life—several months before Pearl Harbor when a Nazi-inspired youth movement came close to overthrowing the Liberian government. He remained in office, however, and remained popular.

Liberian Atrocities

A typical example of Liberian atrocity was committed by the republic on September 7, 1943, when native MPs and members of the Frontier Force looted and set fire to 106 bamboo huts in the quaint village of "Talking Charlie"—about a mile from the military camp. The reason for the wholesale arson: the natives didn't pay enough taxes to the Liberian government—which became jealous over some of the Army workers' wages (and the money earned by native, free-lance prostitutes)—thought it was best to burn their homes. In 1942, the village reportedly paid \$255 in taxes, about \$2.50 per shack; yet that wasn't enough.

A certain rogue named Commissioner Peabody, who had more Americans imprisoned than any other Liberian, ordered the village burned because native girls weren't kicking in their tithe. He wanted everybody to pay a road tax. What road? Natives used no roads, for there were no roads, except for U.S. Army use. Natives were expected to pay a road tax for walking over serpentine paths through a thick jungle.

Imposing the road tax was not half the story. There was the misery brought by the burning homes. Since September is the rainiest month of the year, the 600 inhabitants had to sleep in trees and on the ground during heavy rains. Nearly a quarter of the villagers were Army employees who had brought families and relatives from the interior so they could support them. The American command could have protested to President Barclay for the wanton destruction of the village, but it made no such effort, fearing it would disrupt the diplomatic balance between the U.S. and Liberia.

* * *

A wealthy native merchant near our camp attempted to divorce his wife because she had had relations with another Liberian. The allegation was nothing new, but the case went to court. When it was learned how much money the merchant had, the court granted him a divorce but charged him \$12,000.

The merchant had prospected in the bush and found a rich gold mine. But as soon as he started to work the mine, the government swooped in and seized it, claiming that native Liberians could not operate gold mines because they are the property of the government. This particular native maintained a secret vein—and continued to sell gold at \$25 an ounce. He sold much of his precious metals to goldsmiths, who in turn diluted it with brass to make trinkets—which were bought by Americans who thought they were gold.

* * *

Flogging was not uncommon in the republic. One Sunday, Paramount Chief Dolokel en Paye was roughly handled and flogged with cowhide at the central prison by Frontier Force guards. Of course, they were simply carrying out the orders of the jailer, who was about as indifferent to his own people as he was to chimpanzees. According to reports, the chief—who was being held in a murder case as an accessory before and after the fact—inadvertently dropped an old zinc bucket in the prison well when he attempted to draw drinking water. The soldiers claimed the bucket was theirs, and they reported the clumsy conduct of the chief to Thomas J. Brooks, the mad jailer.

Brooks, aware of the propensity of the guards to beat and otherwise mistreat prisoners, even without pretext, nevertheless told them to force Chief Paye to retrieve the bucket, the African Nationalist newspaper later reported. No sooner was the order given, according to the report, than the chief's "flowing gown

was torn to shreds, and the cowhide commenced to do the heart-rending work on the chief's back."

This incident indicated the lack of humanity, sympathy, and intelligent control that existed in Liberia's prisons, which were not reformatories, but dungeons of torture and brutality.

* * *

In lower Buchanan, a native named Quel-Mle complained to Thomas Greaves, the superintendent of Grand Bassa County, because someone sued Quel-Mle and his brother-in-law for "illegal detention of wife named Blason." Quel decided the best strategy was to run away to a reverend for help.

Some messengers sent by the commissioner pursued by Quel to Beh town where he hid, and he was arrested and bound in heavy rope. In pain, he begged for the ropes to be loosened. But the messengers would not let him go until he promised to give up his kitchen full of rice as security. Unable to endure the pain, he consented and was freed.

Quel again escaped, this time crossing the St. John River. After a while, he began farming in a forest called Kne-Bken-Ne-Kra-Pko, leaving his "principal" wife with two younger sons, his daughter and her sons in Beh town to oversee his large kitchen of rice.

As Quel farmed, Liberian soldiers sent out in search of him by Commissioner Taylor found his wife and children at Beh, arrested them, and stole all the rice they had. They brought the prisoners and the rice to Taylor, who had the wife and children imprisoned in the compound.

In the meantime, some soldiers had heard from a chief that Quel was farming across the river, so they sent messengers off to arrest him. When he saw the messengers approaching, Quel attempted to run off, but he tripped over a log. One of his pursuers attacked the fallen Quel with a native sword, cutting off a finger

from the right hand that Quel held up in defense. A second messenger, repulsed by the sight of a severed finger lying on the ground, bade his cohorts to do no further bodily harm.

Quel leapt to his feet and into the bush to see what had been done to his hut. He found that eighteen fowl, two large iron pots, four buckets of clean rice, several large hampers of rough rice, and all his money had been stolen. They had completely destroyed him and taken all his possessions. No one knows what became of his wife and children. Some believe they died soon after.

* * *

On November 27, 1943, another incident took place, which characterized the atrocious nature of the Liberian ruling class. Paramount Chief "Talking Charlie" came to camp in dire need of money. It seems that a transient native girl stopped at one of his huts for chow one day. The chief was willing to serve up some slop and began cooking some monkey and rice soup. But after it had boiled sufficiently, he inadvertently spilled a cup full of the hot liquid on his visitor's foot. She became so enraged that she rushed over to Commissioner Peabody and told him what had happened.

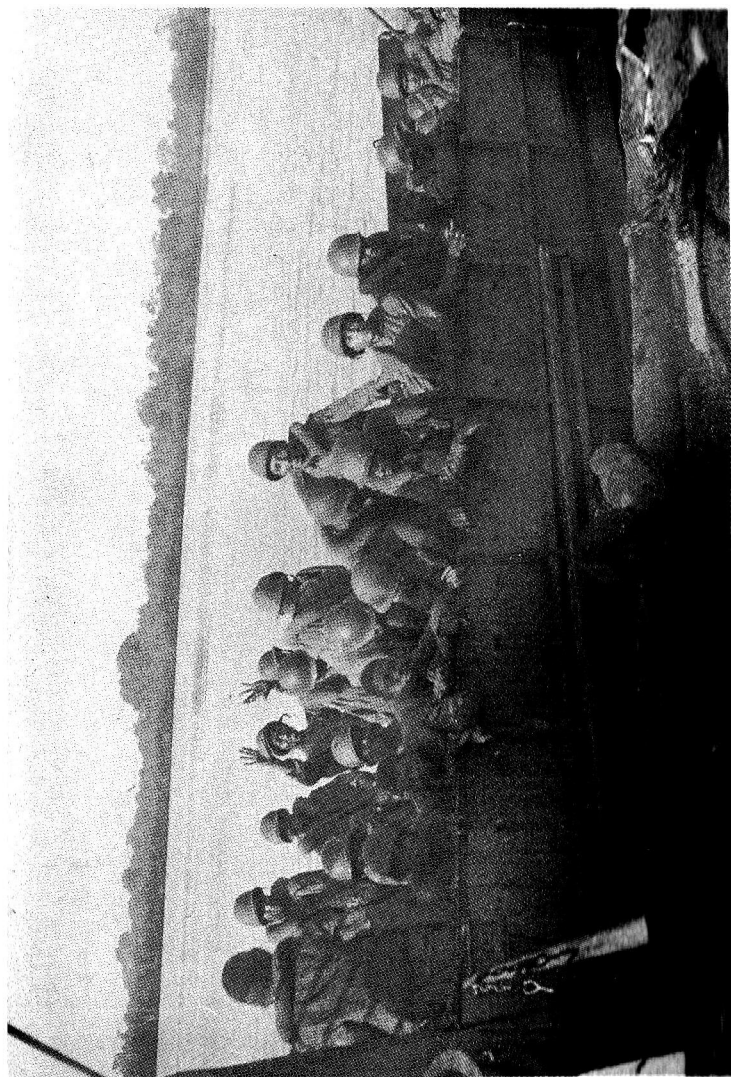
Peabody sent Liberian soldiers to arrest "Talking Charlie." He was cast into prison and told he would be released only after a ten-dollar fine was paid. He was unable to muster the money, so the old man remained in jail for many months.

Of course, the clans and the paramount chiefs were not all perfectly honest, either. The chiefs could be as much a party to the country's extortion as the commissioners. There was constant political intrigue in the form of bribery and other underhanded methods for the position of chief, and an equal amount of chicanery for the job of commissioner. The removal and replacement of all chiefs had to be approved in Monrovia. The appointee was

required to pay a whopping sum to the commissioner—so the more changes in office, the more profitable for the grafters.

Frontier Force members were constant robbers and looters throughout the country. Equipped with U.S. know-how after three months of schooling, they became worse than ever. After several villages dispersed following Frontier Force rampages, the force actually made an effort to perform some half-hearted public relations. Emissaries of the force, so the story went, convinced six families to move back to an abandoned village in the Gessi country by promising that, were they to do so, there would be no looting.

The ruling class grand-scale robbery, plundering and murder continued practically unabated during the time U.S. troops were stationed in Liberia. There seemed no way out of the sorry condition, and it was as sad as it was ironic: the very people entrusted to care for Liberia's people and its future were the ones who prevented the country from progressing and prospering.



Americans land in Liberia!



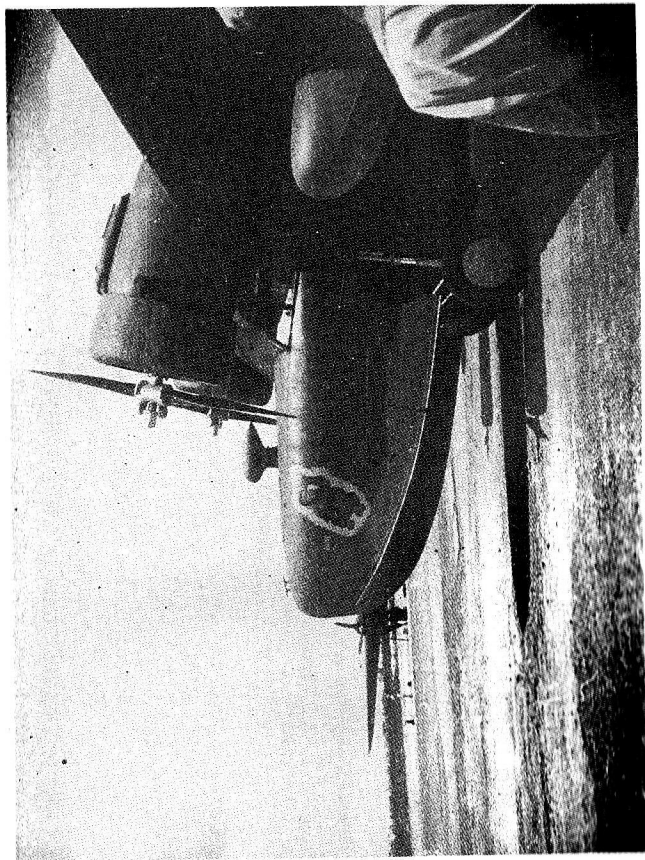
Pfc. Napoleon Taylor, the first American soldier to set foot in Liberia in 1942.



U.S. Army soldier instructing a Liberian on the use and maintenance of military weaponry.



U.S. troops instructing Liberians on the maintenance of military equipment.



Billy-O, an amphibious plane named for the chimp who was the unit's mascot, was flown by Captain Grice.



President Roosevelt dining with Liberian President Barclay during his trip to visit the Firestone rubber plantations.



Workers who maintained the Firestone rubber plantations lived in villages of palm-thatched huts.



Local fishing methods.



American soldier Sergeant Archie Huffstatler thumbs his nose at the swastika over the door of the empty German headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia.



Liberian men were recruited and trained to become M.P.s and soldiers for Task Force 5889.



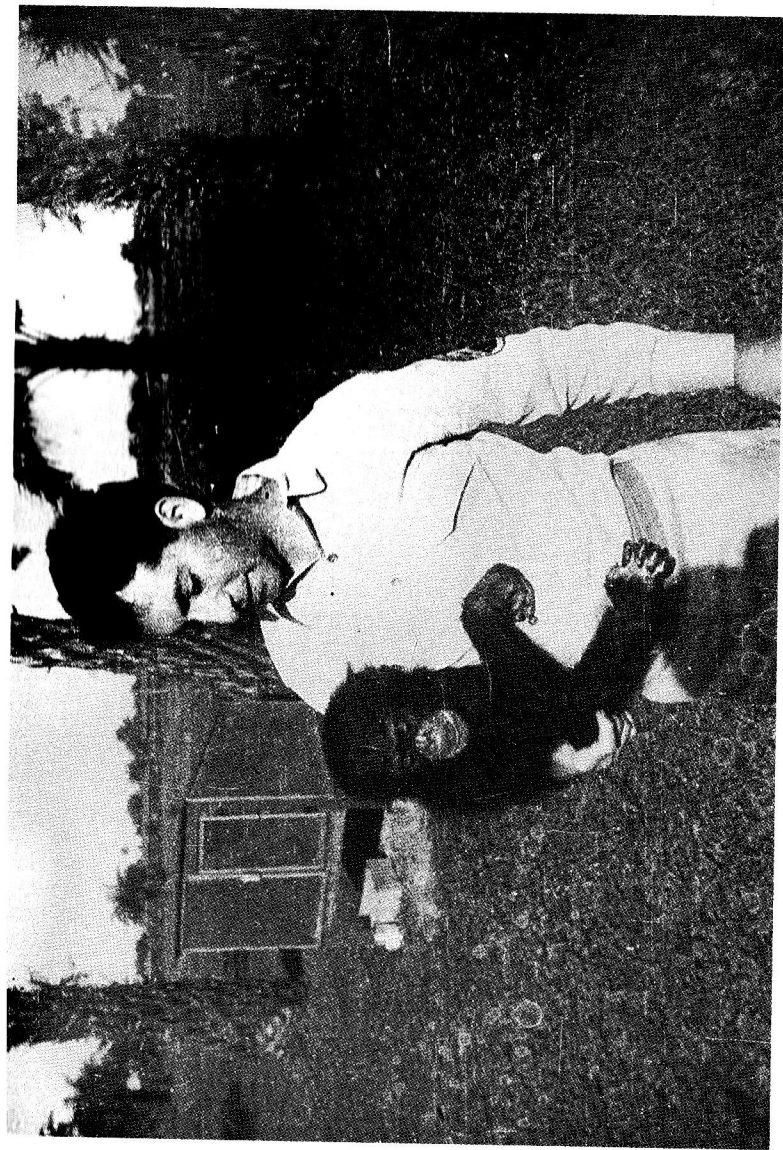
American doctors feeling native's spleen for malaria.



Camp Shangri-La, home to three hundred Army-hired native girls.



Camp Paradise, also home to three hundred native girls



The Unit's mascot and number one morale builder Billy-O the chimp.



The South African Medical Corps' Snake Catching Unit caught poisonous snakes and milked the venom, which was used to counteract bites.



President Roosevelt reviews troops.

Camp Life

The command issued an order to have folks back home send cheap, junk jewelry for each soldier to carry with him in case he got lost in the jungle. We were to use the jewelry for bartering with the natives. It wasn't a bad idea: they loved jewelry, American perfume, soaps and other inexpensive items that were nonetheless novelties in the Liberian bush.

One soldier—a sergeant—received a huge box full of trinkets and decided he could make money selling them to “prosperous” natives, that is, those who had a meager income because they were employed by the Army. But one enterprising native was a step ahead of the soldier. He bought a piece of jewelry, then doctored it up and offered to sell it back to the original soldier with the story that it was made from the bone of a rare pink elephant.

“How much you want for it?” the GI asked.

“Fifty dolluh,” came the reply. “Not too common.”

The sergeant paid the fifty dollars and was very pleased.

“I’ll send it home to my wife,” he boasted.

Three months later, he received a letter from his wife.

“The pink elephant pin was one of the cheap ones we sent you to barter,” she wrote. “Hope you didn’t get beat.”

Some soldiers did land office business selling brags from home to natives. The boys had them shipped over, just as they guessed, they sold like hot cakes. Jungle belles loved silk stockings, panties, and all kinds of soaps and perfumes.

One of the jungle girls, Pee Wee, was about thirteen years old and “built like a brick latrine,” as they used to say in the

Army. T. Sgt Ed had a real crush on her. He'd go into the bush and see her every night. It took real love to do that: walking through a dense jungle, which was infested with snakes, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and crocodiles.

Ed would sneak out food from the chow line for Pee Wee. Unfortunately, she got deathly sick from eating the Army chow. Pee Wee's family took her to an enterprising witch doctor. He kept Pee Wee confined in a thatch hut, and Ed would sneak in and give her food. He also slipped her a couple of GI pills. The Army would give you pills for anything, from diarrhea to a broken arm. The pills acted like a can of Drain-O in a sluggish toilet. (They were powerful. Put one in a gas tank, we used to say, and it would propel the truck fifty feet.) Pee Wee got better.

With Pee Wee back in the pink, the sergeant decided to take her to her camp. But the witch doctor had a fee. "Two hundred dolluh," he demanded. Ed mumbled that, at that price, "he must have been trained in an American medical school." There was some back and forth, and eventually Ed paid a hundred dollars and took Pee Wee with him.

That night, Ed returned to the witch doctor with three cans of American beer. Into each he had slipped four of the pink GI pills. He then got out of the village in a hurry. We assumed that, by the following evening, the witch doctor was probably a good twenty-five pounds lighter.

A Pig in a Poke

An Iowa farm boy, T/Sgt. John McConniville, decided he wanted a pig, so he bought a tiny porker from a nearby native chief. He then agreed to pay a local native known as "Small Boy No. 2" a dollar a month to feed the piglet a daily diet of Army scraps and garbage.

Five months passed, and it was now Christmastime. As a holiday treat, the sergeant decided to butcher his swine and treat the entire company to a special Christmas dinner. He urged his friends to go on a restricted diet and "save plenty of room" for pork chops.

With much fanfare and not a little playful bravado, the butchering crew left for the bush, taking with them ropes, pulleys, poles, and other paraphernalia to capture and slaughter their Yuletide meal. McConniville even brought along a photographer to document for the folks back in Iowa how big a pig can grow under jungle conditions.

When the troops reached the pen, the crew burst into laughter—except for McConniville, who turned purple with anger. Before them was the scrawny runt of a porker, not much larger than a house cat.

"Small Boy No. 2" was quickly summoned to do some explaining. Turns out the native was a bit of a racketeer. Not only did he pocket the dollar a month from the sergeant, he sold the Army garbage to other natives for food. The pig was left to subsist on a diet of betel nuts.

McConniville, torn between embarrassment and rage, let loose with an avalanche of cuss words, impressing upon the young boy that a farm-bred Yankee doesn't take kindly to such skullduggery.

Still, he let "Small Boy No. 2" off with little more than the tongue lashing and, instead of pork chops that Christman, the sergeant ate something closer to crow.

Mistaken Identity

One morning at around six o'clock, four husky natives from the nearby village of "Talking Charlie" surrounded me in a none-too-friendly manner. I asked what was the trouble.

“Wanna jenna pee!”

“Want what?”

“Wanna jenna pee!”

They went into a huddle, and I couldn't figure out if they were selling souvenirs or what. Fortunately, one of the native boys who worked at the Army base happened upon us. He understood the Bassa language and was able to straighten me out.

It seems the men were upset about a guinea pig, which a private had swiped from their village the previous evening after calling on one of his native girlfriends. I was able to locate the soldier in question and, sure enough, he bore a passing resemblance to me. He told me, rather nonchalantly, that he didn't recall stealing the animal but, as luck would have it, he did wake up that morning to find a guinea pig sleeping on his chest. What a coincidence.

He gladly turned the small animal over to the natives and was given a dollar, which he was told he paid for the mammal. He did not recall making any such payment.

Food for Thought

Every now and then, often in the midst of some mundane chore, we were reminded that we inhabited a world far different than the one we left across the Atlantic.

Here's an example: We were overseeing the digging of a well. A group of natives labored furiously under the hot sun, digging into red clay hardpan. There was nothing unusual about the situation until two plump frogs appeared from somewhere. They met with immediate misfortune.

A pair of natives seized the unfortunate animals, bit their heads off, and wolfed them down, entrails and all. I had heard of frogs' legs, but that was ridiculous.

The truth of the matter was, local natives routinely supplemented their diet with whatever animals—alive or dead—they could get their hands on. Whenever we had goat or lamb for chow, natives always fought one another to dig the heads out of the garbage pails. Eventually, the natives made a habit of patrolling the trash cans and, after meal time, any food that was left over was given to them.

We gave them the leftovers in spite of protests from Army brass that such practices were unsanitary. The Army had an inconsistent view of such matters. It didn't mind having soldiers shacking up with syphilitic prostitutes, but it wailed when soldiers gave natives scraps of food, or failed to prevent them from rummaging through garbage pails.

There were some MPs who shared commanders' distaste for natives prowling in the trash. It was common to hear the MPs yell at or take off after the intruders. A pair of zealous MPs once chased beggars who lifted a can of slop for more than half a mile before apprehending them and returning the trash to the mess sergeant.

Sometimes, the garbage pails provided the natives with more than they bargained for.

One night, a cry pierced the jungle—the wildest cry I ever heard. A Kpessi boy stole garbage from a pail in which lye had been dumped. He ate the contents—lye and all—and nearly died from it.

The lye turned the inside of his mouth black and disintegrated his teeth to stumps before we could administer a vinegar emetic, which barely saved his life.

Not that gruesome things to eat couldn't be found in places other than garbage pails. Those of us who stood in the mess line one day lost our appetites when we saw natives above us in a palm tree, fighting one another to get at a rats' nest.

They had a field day: More than thirty rats captured and killed. Kids fought over them. Some, whose pockets were already

bulging with bleeding, dead rats, were greedy enough to snatch away still more vermin from smaller boys.

Suddenly, someone spotted a cobra entwined on a limb near the nest. The natives scrambled down the tree to size up the situation. It wasn't long before one bold volunteer shimmied up the tree and, with a machete, killed the six-foot-long, deadly snake. It dropped harmlessly to the ground like a piece of rope. No one fought over it.

Having seen natives eat frogs and rats, we couldn't be blamed for suspecting them in the disappearance of a dog or two. While we had no evidence, except a skeleton, we were certain one of our pet dogs ended up on a native platter.

One Army worker who discovered the clean-picked bones of his pet poodle became mad enough to wage a one-man war against the "canine cannibals."

His retribution was swift and severe.

The aggrieved former dog owner seized six natives and summarily found them guilty of feasting on his defenseless poodle. They were then tied to stakes and each given fifty lashes with a rawhide by other natives who were paid to carry out the painful punishment. Rock salt was then rubbed into the gashes.

The Buzi tribe was noted for raising dogs for food but, when possible, they preferred eating dogs raised by somebody else.

A Sackful of Snacks

One morning, I noticed a native carrying a heavy-looking burlap sack over his shoulder. Out of curiosity, I stopped him and asked him what he had. He seemed reluctant to let me in on his secret, but a cigarette induced him to open his bag.

I took a peek inside and jumped back in surprise.

At first, I thought it was a huge, green snake. On closer inspection, however, I saw that the sack contained thousands of

large, green grasshoppers. They're something of a delicacy in Africa where they are served roasted in palm oil, which makes them crisp, like Spanish peanuts.

This isn't as crazy as it might sound. Even the War Department recognized the nutritional value of grasshoppers. It advised soldiers who got lost to eat them.

Monkey Business

Oddly enough, it took a chimpanzee to create the worst friction between white and black servicemen.

The first sergeant demonstrated his atavistic tendencies by paying a husky, peanut-brained private who shall remain nameless twenty-five cents to bash in the brains of a female chimpanzee. The American private, like the moron he was, fulfilled this request by mercilessly flinging the chimp (which undoubtedly had more brains than he and the sergeant combined) against a tree. The animal lay there suffering and feebly chattering, so another pea-brained soldier finished off the job with a baseball bat.

The black nurse and officers of the Twenty-Fifth Station Hospital, to whom the chimpanzee belonged, howled with anger and demanded action. There was reason to believe things might come to an ugly head.

Fortunately, action was taken—formal action.

The private who first attacked the chimp had violated the 96th Article of War by committing an act that was "a discord to the prejudice of good order and military discipline." He was heavily fined and court-martialed. I took credit for getting the soldier punished. I told the general about it and he took action immediately.

The corporal was shipped out.

The Mayor and the Medicine Man

The mayor of "Talking Charlie" showed up at headquarters one day seeking medical assistance.

"Charlie," the mayor for whom "Talking Charlie" was named, was afflicted with an almost unbelievable array of disease—gonorrhea, rheumatism, cirrhosis of the liver, malaria, and various aches and pains, just to name a few. I took him to the dispensary for treatment. The doctor, Willie Sartor, scratched his head as to what to do; for the first time since becoming a pill roller, he was stumped.

"Well, Charlie," he finally said, "we're going to fix you up."

On the shelf were rows of bottles containing various pills. Dr. Willie took two pills each from about twenty bottles, mixed them together, placed them all in a box and handed them over to the withered chief.

"Take two every time you hear the pepper bird," Willie instructed.

About two days later, the chief came back looking pretty haggard and asking for more pills. I asked him why he didn't go to the local medicine man for treatment. Talking Charlie rubbed his bony hand across his forehead and said, "Medicine man help me? He no good. He got same troubles I got."

Aviation Horrors

A twin-engine plane struck a tree near Bondiway Court (the court used for trying accused natives) at Firestone Plantations, exploding and killing the crew of two officers and three enlisted men.

Parts of the plane, and the men, fell into Du River. Natives waded in up to their necks in an effort to retrieve the remains of the dead crew.

It was ghastly to see natives bobbing to the surface. One shouted wildly, "Me got man's head!"

At the morgue, the remains were matched together as closely as possible by comparing jewelry, whiskers, gold teeth, watches, and anything else that seemed to help. Even so, one soldier admitted he saw three legs in one coffin before it was laid to rest near the plantation site.

Airplane accidents are not only gruesome, but they have odd idiosyncrasies. For instance, an airplane crash will blow a human body to bits, but seldom remove the socks.

Early to Bed

Shortly before the Women's Army Corps was due to arrive at a base on the Gold Coast, an American sergeant was detailed to instruct a native girl ("wogs" we called them) on how to properly make a WAC's bed.

The work, it was assumed, was proceeding apace, but just to be on the safe side, two officers decided to stop in and see how the girl was progressing. When they opened the door to the WAC's barracks, they found the hard-working sergeant in bed with the native girl.

He was court-martialed.

A Color-blind Sun

Can natives get sunburned? As it turns out, yes. We had several who could not work because they were suffering the stinging effects of the sun.

The African sunburn is a strange thing. It is short-lived, but comes on quickly—even on cloudy days. Naturally, the lighter the skin, the more susceptible the person is to sunburn.

Eventually, the sun could act as a great equalizer. Some white men became so dark from their long hours in the sun, that when they entered the hospital for treatment of certain ailments, they were marked in the register as being black.

A Harassing Complaint

The adjutant was a hard-boiled infantry officer, but he broke into laughter upon receiving this letter from a misinformed native who had a "harassing complaint."

Dear Major:

Your letter bearing the date of April 2, 1943, came duly to hand, and in reply, permit me to say with a degree of seriousness, the advice you give, pointing me to my civilian doctor, who is in charge of the Government Hospital.

I have followed the advice and went to him with a degree of seriousness, as my complaint is one from which I **MUST BE RELIEVED**, as you will agree and see with me, further down in this letter, as I relate the whole story. But he says that he has no power to recommend; that those who wish to be treated by you, may go to you themselves and be **ADMITTED BY YOU**.

Now, Doctor, I shall go on to tell you my complaint, and I am quite sure that you will make some way to help me when you hear from me. I am *impotent!* That is to say, not wholly so, but I am coming so fast, in this; sometimes when I *want* an erection I cannot get it at that moment! Yet, I have sharp desire for same. Sometimes nature rises, and when the time comes for action, it falls. About three or four o'clock in the morning I can get an erection quite easily. Doctor, impotency, as you know, is the most harassing complaint one can be possessed of. You know then, when I ask you for relief, I **AM SERIOUS**.

I have heard of many men you have cured and I know that you can cure me. I am 68 years of age and I can see no reason why I should suffer from this disease.

Heretofore, this disease could not be cured in this country and now we are so glad! You have come, and can cure this harassing disease.

Earnestly yours,

Author's note:

Viagara come 50 years later.

Pidgin Droppings

Pidgin English was the accepted language of Africa during the World War II years. The following letter, written by a seventeen-year-old boy to an American soldier who had returned home, provides a good example of how "armyized" natives spoke and wrote.

23 July 1944

Dear Mahstuh:

I am all right, fine fine. How about him. He go back two months now. I see no paper. Everybody good. Him write if he got paper and send for me. I want to send for American shirt, show how much it cost. I be staying in school. I'm write small, small in the school. I'm read, small, small. I savvy addition, subtraction (take away) savvy small, small.

My mother and father all good, my brother, and sister fine, fine. I stand the work now too. I'm be head man for new men. Plenty, plenty work, he come work. Work left, small he finish. He dey inside.

If you got writing paper write to Sgt. King and tell Sgt. King I'm be fine, fine, and I be standing the work, too. Isaac, too, be standing the work, too. Sgt. Jones he too dey inside. He be fine

new man. He savvy work plenty. I write this paper November 19 Station Gold Coast.

Sgt. Kansas he dey. He be fine man. Sgt. Levine he too be fine man, past everybody small. Sgt. No-hair he dey. Sgt. Levine, he got whiskey fever today for Saturday night he drink freely.

If you want something for Gold Coast, tell me and send it to him.

Your faithful obedient servant
Kobina Asiful

The Winds of War

No one likes to come in contact with tear gas, and African natives—probably owing to their largely unpolluted air—seemed particularly sensitive to the stinging effects of the gas. But an incident one afternoon left witnesses as teary-eyed—from laughing—as the poor natives who were caught in the noxious clouds.

Following a gas drill, an instructor released chloropicrin while we were returning to camp. But the winds shifted, sending the tear-jerking mists wafting through an outdoor latrine. Soon, five pantsless natives scurried out of the shack, slapping their rear ends and screaming for all they were worth.

This presented a problem for the gas officer. The Army, as best as we could recall, had never issued instructions as to what should be done for gas victims caught with their pants down.

A Tale with a Tail

Once, when I was working at headquarters, the general excused himself to use the bathroom. When he returned, he had a white trail of toilet paper dangling from the back of his pants.

No one had the courage to tell the officer that he had an embarrassing tail. I could have, but I figured this was payback for some of the many pictures he had confiscated from me.

Water Woes

In the bush, our toilet consisted of a "slit trench"—a hole dug into the ground. You did your thing in the trench and if you weren't careful, you fell in.

While no fun for any of us, this setup drove one GI, a fellow by the name of Hooker, crazy. He had a terrible complex and perceived everything as teeming with germs. He'd tie his shoes with his gloves on and open a screen door with his elbow. He'd even use his own silver eating utensils, because he didn't want to become "taminated."

We weren't all that bad. The Army gave us a big "lister bag" filled with water pumped in from the river. It was the color of molasses. We'd dump salt tablets and chlorine into the bag to kill any bugs in the water. Whenever I hear anyone complaining about the drinking water in the States nowadays, it makes my blood boil.

Outsmarting the Censors

We were not allowed to write and tell where we were. But Katy was smart. After months of frustration, she sent me a telegram. I received it and, when she got confirmation, she noticed the return address had Firestone Plantations on it. She looked up Firestone and found it was in Akron, Ohio. From there, she got wind that the plantations were in Liberia, and that's where I was.

Censorship was heavy. We often couldn't send pictures home without having them closely scrutinized. Since I was often

field correspondent for the Army publication *Yank* magazine, I had a chance to take many pictures. I would send photographs of Army life and African life home to Katy, but the general made sure they were censored and some of the good pictures were pulled out. (The postal clerk later told me that those photos, deemed too sensitive to be sent through the mail, the general forwarded to his wife). We fixed this. A “tame” photo was enclosed in an envelope, approved and sealed. The postal clerk would then retrieve the envelope and hand it back to me. I’d steam open the envelope, insert the pictures that would normally have been censored, and then send the package on its way. Many of the photos in this book were sent home in this fashion.

It’s amazing how vivid my black-and-white photos have remained after decades in a cardboard box in the basement. The big problem I had was developing the film in Africa after the pictures were taken. The heat would cause the emulsion on the film to “reticulate,” leaving the print with what resembled cracks on an alligator’s hide. I would wait until 3:00 A.M. to develop the film in the coolness of the early morning.

Katy would often mail me film from the States, or I could swap my beer ration with some of the boys in the Signal Corps.

Cases of Racism

I was in the Army for four and a half years, and I got along great. But I must admit, there were plenty of cases of racism in the outfit. One black soldier faced court-martial for “spitting in a disgusting manner”—in the jungle! A white lieutenant insisted on court-martialing the soldier. Fortunately, the judge refused to let the case proceed.

We used to attend church in the bush each Sunday. The chaplain did a great job with his sermons. One day, the first sergeant—a clean-shaven, red-faced redneck—had a complaint.

We had four black members who sang, "Amazing Grace," "Bright on the Corner," "How Great Thou Art," "Beyond the Sunset," and other songs, which spread sunshine and solace among our troops. The sergeant didn't like the idea of blacks singing and went to the chaplain.

"If you don't get those niggers out of here," he warned, "I won't go to church each Sunday."

The chaplain caved in to the redneck. Church attendance in the bush dropped off. I told the chaplain he made a big mistake, but he said he was under pressure from the commander. At any rate, I quit attending Sunday morning services.

Getting Along by Going Along

Being a soldier in a jungle outpost is far different from being in North Africa, where there was high morale due to front-line activity. A fellow GI told me that, to get by in Africa or anywhere, "You can get along if you keep your eyes open, your mouth shut, your ears open, and your hands clean."

There was a strange feeling between Selective Service (draft) soldiers and the regular Army personnel. One officer of twenty-nine years' service was busted for some minor infraction, and the commandant put my name in for the job. It caused a lot of bad feelings. The commandant said, "Abe, you better hang on to your stripes. I'm gonna get 'em back and it's not going to be pleasant for you." That warning put me on guard at all times. A regular Army captain (a mean scoundrel) warned me, "Soldier, we're gonna get those stripes back." He did everything to get me, but I wouldn't give him the chance. I remembered the advice to keep my "eyes open, mouth shut, ears open, and hands clean," and I survived the evil tactics.

Many efforts were made to trick me into goofing up and losing my stripes. The captain assigned me to take a prisoner to

the stockade. The GI was a carefree fellow, who evidently didn't care if he was shot or not. He was to march sixteen feet ahead of me as we made our way down the road. The captain said, "If he attempts to escape, shoot him right in the head."

Killing a person wasn't anything I could do. I walked over to the prisoner and said, "Joe, they told me to shoot you if you tried to escape. Promise you will not try it."

"Don't worry, Abe, I would never try to escape."

Joe kept his word. We arrived at the stockade without incident. I thanked him and wished him well.

What a pitiful sight at the barbed-wire stockade. Prisoners got up at 5:00 A.M., put on a full field pack, and marched inside the compound yelling, "One, two, three, four," under a broiling African sun all day long.

'Good Friend, I Have Something for You'

On Wednesdays we had off, and one of the things we liked to do was travel to Ghana and various cities along the coast. West Africa was riddled with Lebanese merchants. They all had black young girls dressed in white, and all the girls did all day long was sit on stools and watch their boyfriends rake in American money.

I approached one merchant who looked to be about twenty-one years old. I'm of Lebanese descent, so I said, "I'm Lebanese." He said, "You are one of my countrymen. What can I do for you? You are my good friend, one of my countrymen."

He had a Zeiss icon folding camera, which I liked.

"How much?" I asked. He motioned for me to come closer and said, "For you, two hundred dolluh. You are a good friend."

I was all set to pay him two hundred dollars, but after I took a closer look at the camera, I backed off. There was a big chip

in the edge of the lens. It was a contest between two Lebanese. I never liked people who played money games with me.

I said, "Good friend, I have something for you."

I fished out an old Voightland camera the Army had discarded. I had scrubbed it up and painted it with a glossy finish. There was just one thing wrong with the camera: It had no lens.

"How much?" he asked. "Two hundred dolluhs," I said. He rolled out a wad big enough to choke a cow. Since he had tried to skin me out of \$200, I thought he should get the same treatment.

A Letter of Thanks

Enlisted men were the beneficiaries of thousands of acts of kindness by those stateside. That we remained in the thoughts and prayers of our friends, families, and fellow Americans was a constant source of strength to us. We also received support and supplies from people of other countries and for these, our appreciation could not have been more heartfelt or profound. When time permitted, we let those who helped us know how much their support meant. As one time offering of proof, here is a letter written by a David Livingstone to a Mrs. Gray of Cape Town:

Shire Cataracts
14 July 1943

My dear lady:

I feel exceedingly obliged by your kindness in making such a beautiful mosquito curtain for me. Beyond a doubt it is the handsomest that ever appeared in this country, and I am a great admirer of the invention. This you will readily believe when I inform you that the greatest and most unaccountable folly of my life was traveling all over this continent without once thinking

that the pest could be escaped from. Philosophy and thinking that we live in a state of interdependence, and as other animals, are sacrificed to our use, so we must suffer a little for their enjoyment, afforded the poorest consolation and now I leave philosophy to them, "get in near me if you can" and laugh as they dash themselves against the meshes. Many thanks for your kindness.

David Livingstone

The Belles of Shangri-La

(Author's note: Much of this chapter is based on an Army report given to me by Headquarters of 5889.)

As a volunteer clerk in headquarters, I helped write and type Army reports. A certain officer (his name escapes me) did a great job with one of the reports. He asked for my help, since I often worked with the Army medics during inspections at the Shangri-La and Paradise prostitution camps on Sunday mornings, and on treks into the bush to collect samples of natives' blood. Keep in mind this report is more than fifty years old, but many of the ingredients are still valid. We owe a debt of gratitude to the forgotten colonel who put the information together. I was pleased to be a small part of his efforts. The experience I had working with the medical officers helped me keep my sanity. Boredom is a mind-killer in a jungle outpost.

Why Controlled Prostitution?

"... We cannot ring the noses of our men and tie them up in compounds or corrals at night. . . . I should like to ask him (the moralist) to remember that fighting men cannot be herded about like steers and capons. . . ."

With these words, an American summed up his viewpoint concerning the complex problem of satisfying the sexual inclinations of white and Negro troops serving in hot, rain-lashed Liberia. Aside from malaria, venereal morbidity presented the biggest

headache to the command. In this dreary, fever-ridden country, which had long resisted the inroads of civilization, there was no morale-building front-line action and no "Great White Way." In short, no place to take temporary leave to fight off the mind-numbing monotony of camp life. In a land of extreme climates—from glaring dryness to torrential downpours—there was no recreation. The movies could only be run whenever the electrical storms allowed. Under these circumstances, it was not unnatural that the troops turned their attention to women during their idle hours.

Upon arrival of these troops, in a land of cheap "jig-jig" (promiscuous intercourse), the men found the quickest way to forget about their homesickness was to make frequent trips into the fog-bound jungles. This sent the already troublesome venereal rate soaring to an alarming and almost perfect score of 1,000 cases per 1,000 men per year, damaging the health and working efficiency of the troops. While the men were in the jungle seeking out lively native girls, they contracted malaria, an insidious disabler that works even faster on venereal men. Soon, malaria rose to become a worse problem than VD. Men can fight while infected with venereal diseases, but a malarial casualty is little better than a dead man.

The Army became panicky. The brass and local officials met to discuss a situation so unique, there didn't appear to be a textbook solution. Clearly, drastic action would be needed. How could the Army prevent men from roaming the malarial swamps? It was determined that the soldiers would have to be forced to ration their jig-jig from more than 200 times per man per year to a more sensible figure—say, 100 times per man per year. This would be difficult since fun-loving "tee-tees" (young, half-nude, ochre-painted native girls) were attracted to camp like iron filings to a magnet.

Wearing nothing but the least, all types of women came flocking in from the interior—from young girls to G-stringed

ladies on the drooping side of fifty-nine—and almost all of them were teeming with organisms causing chancroid, syphilis or gonorrhea, possibly even AIDS, although it was unknown then. These natives beckoned from every bush, and some were bold enough to awaken sleeping soldiers and tell them what they came for. Foot-worn trails connected the camp with palm-roofed villages where, each night, drums boomed, voices chanted, and dancers swayed and stomped in frenzy. The upshot: seven of every ten soldiers were infected with one form of sexually transmitted disease or another.

When the first U.S. troops arrived, there was only one small village near the military area, with several other villages within a half-mile radius. It was estimated that within three miles of the airport, there were about ten thousand natives, with men outnumbering women four to one. When males were recruited by the Army for labor purposes, however, it left at least a thousand lively girls “in the age brackets most interesting to soldiers,” as one American health officer put it.

These youthful maidens, most of whom had never seen a white man—and whose fathers only yesterday had waged hereditary warfare against one another—had no social stigma placed upon them for catering to the male trade for money. Conditions were ideal for them. The soldiers had plenty of time and plenty of money, plus connubial interests; the girls had plenty of time but no money. American money was good in Liberia, although most natives had never before seen it.

So the maidens did what girls do around Army camps—they answered the call of the war boom. Devil drums and messengers brought tattooed girls from hundreds of miles away. The border of the military reservation soon came alive with half-nude, fancifully mud-painted females who wore, at most, bright-beaded G-strings. These shy but eager girls turned out to gather a windfall. Stories spread by black panderers—namely that the Americans were wealthy and paid fabulous prices—caused hordes of female

safaris. Mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts migrated coastward for this sudden surge in business created by more than one thousand white and black troops. The Americans must be crazy, some thought, to pay so much for such a trivial commodity.

Brothers, fathers, and uncles did their part by acting as bookers and panderers, bringing free-lance prostitutes with them. Girls were so ubiquitous that white soldiers could select the young creatures such as a Broadway producer would select talent for a production. The usual standard for the most fastidious of the white men was the firmness of the mammary glands. If she supported a sun helmet, the girl was considered good wife material and was selected to serve as a temporary mate.

Nearly every male native, it seemed, was crying, "White fella man! You want gee-gee? I get it plenty fine. Two dolluh."

Spirited urchins who hung around camps picked up ten or fifteen cents for each head they sold. Cohabitation could be purchased for the price of a can of sardines.

But the prostitution business took a decided turn as the youthful females became detribalized and "armyized" enough to fearlessly bring mats with them and cater to soldiers beneath a storage shed—for a better price. The usual charge per service was one shilling—twenty cents—but the girls liked the sweet-smelling soaps Americans used and often preferred these to money. Parents who sold their maidens of marriageable age (12) to the Americans received anything from a can of stolen Spam to men's overshoes.

Inflation in the Jungle

Unfortunately, most of the troops forgot the value of money and used it lavishly, creating the highest standard of the living the region had ever seen. This caused the more parsimonious

troops considerable consternation. Soon, Americans were paying parents ten dollars a piece for daughters.

Inflationary prices applied not only to girls, but to other commodities. Bananas were once purchased three for a cent; coconuts two for a nickel, oranges two for a penny. But big dashes by unthinking Americans sent coconuts to 35 cents (higher than in the United States) and bananas to three for 15 cents.

It was initially possible to hire a native girl on a monthly basis for a dollar and a can of hominy, but the money-wise natives jacked the price skyward and kept it there for a long time. Even "farm" business was affected (once male labor was hired by the Army, the females who normally worked on farms quit, brought their daughters as close as possible to the military reservation, and used what money their daughters gave them to buy food from merchants who ran small shops at the Firestone plantations).

Many troops used Army supplies for bartering with native girls, violating the custom laws of the Liberian republic, as well as an agreement between the U.S. and that country.

The ease with which the native women could be had caused problems. The Negro Task Force was sent on a dual mission of constitution and defense. The timely completion of the first portion of this mission depended upon the prompt and effective development of all the available manpower. The completion of the second part depended upon the presence, at all times, of a majority of the troops within the military area. Any negative developments—such as unusual amounts of sickness, prison confinement, and the like—interfered with the fulfillment of the mission.

As a result of too many women on hand and the constant punishing weather, which tends to keep men in low spirits, too many man-days were being lost due to venereal diseases and malaria. Those who were lucky enough not to contract sexual diseases invariably picked up malaria since, in an effort to satisfy

their sexual inclinations, they ventured into grimy regions where scientific mosquito control was never practiced.

The high number of days lost to the effects of VD and malaria created a severe manpower shortage. A few days after the troops came ashore, the VD rate was only 60 per 1,000. In one month it rose to 215 per 1,000 and by August it was 580 per 1,000. It should be noted that other non-combat theaters also boasted higher venereal disease rates when inactivity and ennui overcame the occupational forces. In the European theater, the VD rate doubled between the May and July following VE Day, affecting the equivalent of three infantry divisions. While the American troops were in combat, their VD rate was only 48 per 1,000. In France, where inspected brothels were ordered out of bounds (but street walkers were still available), 3,000 new cases were reported in one week. Over two months in Germany, more than 13,000 American soldiers were infected and, even before fraternization bans were lifted, if the rate had continued, 151 out of every 1,000 soldiers would have contracted venereal disease within a year.

Back in Africa, diseases that the aborigine had been passing from male to female to male to countless generations were having a field day among the American "raw meat." The Army did all it could to control clandestine prostitution. There had been scores of summary court martial convictions, mostly for breaking off-limit restrictions. Still, almost 20 percent of the force was hospitalized in one week due to malaria, presumably acquired while rambling in the bush at night when meat is the sweetest for mosquitoes.

More figures, while boring, could be cited to show why the command at first doubled the possibility of completing the building of the Army encampment, let alone maintaining the occupation. These figures could show the enormity of the problem the Army was up against and give justification for the somewhat

radical plan eventually put into execution. Every logical and obvious method to keep VD and malaria rates down had failed. A police force larger than the military force might have prevented the soldiers from wandering into the jungles, but this was clearly an inefficient and expensive answer. Still, so many men were caught off limits, the stockades were frequently overcrowded—and they could not be expanded, except at further cost to the already diminishing manpower. Men released from the abstention of a long sea voyage were determined to have women, and neither torrential, tropical downpours, sticky, red mud, nor nocturnal dangers lurking in the jungles kept them from seeking out companionship.

The command in Liberia was faced with a double-edged problem: Should work stop so that the troops did not become riddled with malaria and social disease, or should the mission continue at the cost of the troops' health? The Army had long been on record as saying sex suppression was the answer to the problem. But American soldiers in Liberia had plainly seen that sex suppression had been given a fair trial and failed resoundingly.

So drastic action was undertaken—but only after the command made an effort to thoroughly understand the nature of the troops it was dealing with. At issue was a sizable contingent of Negro troops and a small detachment of white troops, the latter deemed so small as to be insignificant in the eyes of the Army. A delicate sex program was necessary for the Negroes, who were suffering great casualties. Thus, a policy of regulated toleration was decided upon. The program was to consist of the restriction of free women to villages sanitized by the Army, the periodic examination and required treatment of these women, and regular prophylactics for the men.

Negro Background

The black troops in our task force were drawn from all parts of the United States, but particularly from the Southeastern states. While a considerable portion were well educated, intelligent, self-restrained individuals, many were of share-cropper origins reared under conditions of abject poverty, ignorance, and disease. Their actions were often governed as much by emotion as reason. The opportunistic gratification of their basic urges—eating, drinking, sleeping, sexual desire, etc—was paramount in any such considerations as the fulfillment of military missions, protection against disease, marital fidelity, and the like.

This contingent had already established a reputation for sexual indulgence and indifference to venereal infection before leaving the States. Their venereal disease rate in the States was above average, indicating they had not been exposed to the usual combination of prophylactics and education. The ship carrying the troops across the Atlantic gave syphilis shots every afternoon—for a disease many of the men had had difficulty avoiding back in the States.

At this point, conclusions should not be drawn between black and white troops—at least not those in our force. For at least three-quarters of the white detachment, who gave no claim to being Ivory Soap-pure, were equally fascinated by Africa's aborigines. These troops' shameful vices will be mentioned elsewhere so as not to suggest that a partial view is given. In many instances, the white men's fondness for black women threatened racial issues when black troops objected strenuously to their white brethren visiting women of their own pigmentation. Men were stabbed, shot, and clubbed over the alluring creatures. Hardened soldiers used to tell the more timid recruit that he wasn't a man until he had relations with a native girl.

Yet black troops suffered the most fatalities as the price for the foolish indulgences. Several soldiers I knew of died of what

was listed on the autopsy as "drowning." It was not uncommon for bloated bodies to be fished from the sluggish, slimy Farmington River. Unlike several white men who drowned while crossing the river in search of "black stuff," black drowning victims were believed to have been pushed into the river by native males who objected to outsiders making love to their "mam-mies." The native men also sold the black soldiers "cane juice," which contained fuel oil and affected the drinker's optical nerves, in some cases driving them insane.

So that VD and malaria—not to mention "drownings"—would no longer affect the rapidly diminishing manpower base, the authorities put into place a unique and sweeping experiment that would have had informed moralists wrinkling their eyebrows. The disease-prevention was based on the heretofore unpopular theory that the segregation and inspection of volunteer prostitutes was the only real answer to the perplexing problem of reducing the venereal rate among black troops. No effort was made to include the white troops since, not only were their venereal rates lower, they made up less than one-tenth of the Task Force.

Birth of a Bordello

Two areas near the Army reservation were selected and cleared. Bamboo sticks were twisted together and used to form thatched, one-room huts. Each palm-roofed dwelling was to be operated by an Army-inspected native prostitute who was prevented from catering to native males or white soldiers. One such village, "Shangri-La," housed around 300 "comforting" girls who were known as "The Belles of Shangri-La." The other village, "Paradise," contained a similar number of local maidens. The little bamboo dwellings, row on row, took the place of cheap road houses, honky tonks, and dine-and-dance tents, such as

those that mushroomed around the Army camps in the states—only on a larger scale. Such a system was not in accordance with Army practices; in fact, opposition to prostitution had long been the formal policy of the U.S. Army and Navy.

The black troops were required to have a ticket to get out of these villages, for it certified that the bearer had taken a chemical prophylactic before leaving.

The system of segregating and inspecting the working girls of Shangri-La and Paradise was a bold stroke, which had long been condemned by medical leaders. On June 9, 1942, the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association said "... medical inspection of prostitutes is untrustworthy, inefficient, gives a false sense of security, and fails to prevent the spread of infection." They obviously weren't aware of the Army's arguments in favor of such a system.

The villages were soon thriving. Shangri-La and Paradise carried on with factory-line precision. They were opened for business from 1:00 to 5:00 P.M., then reopened at 6:00 and operated until 10. A whistle blew at 5:00 P.M., giving the girls time to eat supper and primp for the night shift. It also gave the soldiers time to clear out and get some chow. No troops were allowed in the village between 5:00 and 6:00 P.M. under any circumstances. At 10:00 P.M., another whistle sounded the nightly curfew. Thus the two villages became unique locations of carnival gaiety where handsome black girls with sparkling eyes full of passion and greed vied with one another to service the Americans.

Each of the jolly harlots wore a metal tag around her neck, which was supposed to ensure cleanliness—that is, freedom from venereal disease. It was found that weekly inspections were not enough to keep the women's diseases in check, so daily clinics were held at the Firestone plantations. Girls were located into Army trucks and hauled to their examinations—at least until the practice began to interfere with Firestone's operations. It was

then decided that a prefabricated building on the military grounds would be used for the gynecological exams and treatments. All prostitutes with tags were inspected, and those who were obviously diseased were deprived of their tags until indications of the disease "were no longer manifested." This system had its loopholes. Even though a girl might appear to be free from infection, she could still be the carrier of a germ, as any layman knows. Or, if the first customer she serves after her examination is already infected, she could transmit the disease to every customer from that time until her next exam.

Following the checkups, meetings were held; between 40 and 80 girls were inspected during each week day, and from 100 to 175 girls were checked out on Sundays. The usual practice was for the clinics to be attended by a physician from the Firestone Hospital and one from the Army. But later, a black American officer who was a gynecologist in civilian life was assigned as VD officer.

The inspections were carried out with the knowledge that they were medically ineffective and that there was no record of successful inspections abroad. Examinations, being superficial, usually took about thirty seconds. Blood tests would not reveal syphilis until twenty to forty days after the germ penetrated the body. And in about a third of all cases, the early character does not appear or is not detected.

As is the case in many difficult undertakings, glaring mistakes were made. The initial instructions to both men and women were pathetically idealistic. Authorities assumed that the soldiers and women would take their medicine faithfully each day—which many did not—and refrain from "jig-jig" until cured. Men refused to stay away from the untagged girls and women rejected strenuously to the use of condoms, believing they brought harm. One girl was found dead in a hut, and her colleagues attributed her death to a condom. From then on, prophylactics became taboo

in the villages. Girls often removed the sheaths, shouting, "I got no fever! I got no fever!"

Being believers in spiritualism, many women held to the notion that they acquired strength from their male partners by virtue of contact with semen. In addition, a considerable number of the women wanted babies by the soldiers—particularly the white troops—and got them. They wanted mulatto children because, to them, a twelve-year-old, light-skinned female was as good as a life insurance policy, bringing a high fee from European laborers in Africa.

So, many infected girls, fearing medical treatment, left the villages to resume their activities in the bush, where no treatment was necessary. There, they serviced the white troops who were barred from Shangri-La and Paradise. These diseased girls presented an extremely dangerous menace to the troops who contacted them.

If, upon inspection from medical doctors, any girl from Shangri-La or Paradise was found to be diseased, her tag was removed and she was confined to a "resting area" called "Idylewilde," a barbed-wire enclosure with huts. These girls were often guarded by MPs.

In Idylewilde, the unhappy belles rested and underwent medical treatment, "until the disease had abated." Although the Army knew it, it should be pointed out that there were no female prophylactics that women could use to prevent infection of the male (male prophylactics were all that was available). After the girls were sufficiently rested, they were permitted to return to one of the villages and resume their occupation. The effectiveness of the entire system hinged on how careful the girls were at Idylewilde. But the tag system lent itself to abuses. During menstruation, the girls of Shangri-La would sneak their tags to uninspected girls, who had infections. These women could then walk freely with the tag dangling from their necks.

All in all, the tag systems was pitifully weak. But the native

girls thought so much of their tags, they composed a song of blank verse, which was sung mainly by those locked in Idylewilde. The song was chanted monotonously in hopes of getting another girl's tag. Some believed that the tags had the power to cure any ill. After all, it returned the outcasts back to the villages of Shangri-La and Paradise. They would sing:

All the girls was arrested on Sunday morning—for examination by the doctor.

Then they asked: "Dear girl, will you give me your Jig-jig tag, because I am a poor doctor woman?"

Soon the doctor made me OK again and then I'll go back to Paradise.

I will show you me no got fever for I am coming back to the village.

I no like it here without my doctor tag so if you lend me it, soon I'll go back to Shangri-La.

This simple song, sung without rhyme or semblance of music, was picked up by the native boys who took occasion to poke fun by singing it to girls locked up at Idylewilde.

The Army permitted the girls in both villages to retain all the money they took in and, since they sold themselves for money rather than love, some of the girls' incomes were fantastically high. One Army officer kept a sort of bank account for a native mistress, and her total earnings for a six-month period were \$1,000. Another bush girl earned \$200 within a week to purchase the sewing machine her erstwhile lover promised her. One soldier reportedly left \$700 with his village girlfriend, and when his battalion moved out, he lost both his girl and his money.

In discussing the types of girls who were employed at these camps, distinctions should be made between the Aborigine and the elite of the land, the Americo-Liberians.

The Americo-Liberians were the progeny of the repatriated slaves and other black immigrants from America. Concentrated mainly in the larger coastal cities—Monrovia, Sino, Cape Palmas, etc.—they constituted about five percent of the entire population of the country. But they were the big shots of the land, being politically, economically, and socially dominant. Yet, despite their social position, they seemed to have conformed with, rather than modified, the native venereal customs. In general, Americo-Liberian girls—married or unmarried—were not stigmatized by public knowledge that they were mistresses or prostitutes. While they did not constitute the only group soldiers contacted sexually, they were preferred to the bush women, who were considered frigid due to the Devil Bush treatment, which required the mutilation of their sexual organs. More on this later. The Americo-Liberian women also spoke the same language as the black American troops and had more in common with them socially.

Because they had not undergone the cruel clitoral procedures and therefore could not accommodate as many men in a day as bush girls, Americo-Liberian women made less money and were constantly looked down upon with animosity by their bush sisters. To call an Americo-Liberian woman a bush girl was to offend the former's dignity. Many American troops—black and white—thought enough of Americo-Liberian women to make them their wives. And they made no bones about saying they kissed more effectively than American girls.

It is interesting to note that, at first, the number of prophylactics taken in one month at the two controlled prostitution camps was more than 7,000 for 1,000 troops. Until August 1, 1945, the Army bought 50 million prophylactics a month. Yet, as it has at the end of all wars, the VD rate rose. The venereal upswing

among servicemen was attributed to the discovery of penicillin as a VD cure. This gave men a false sense of security; that if they did contract a disease, they could rush over to the Army doctor and get their treatment over with in five minutes. Another cause for the VD cause was that the Army discontinued the practice of "busting" men who contracted sexual diseases, or requiring them to forfeit pay for lost days lost in the hospital while they were out of commission.

While many natives already had syphilis before American troops arrived, there is no question the disease was also spread to natives from soldiers. Certain islands in the Pacific were free from syphilis until the arrival of American troops. No matter how they got the disease, syphilitics should have been grateful for the Army's medical program. A patient was required to take treatment regularly and under confinement. In private practices, a patient might take two or three treatments, which would clean up the symptoms remarkably. The patient would then feel "cleaned," putting his mind at rest. Consequently, he would not return to complete the treatments. Failure to follow through with treatments, as we know, could lead to untreatable medical problems ten or twenty years later.

One could not look upon the belles of Shangri-La and Paradise without marveling at the speed with which they learned to speak English. The girls also displayed quick wits and the ability to stand up for themselves. For example, one American approached an employee at Shangri-La and said, "Hey, you—pull up your dress for us." She snarled back, "Go to hell, you fish head. I don't ask you to pull down your pants."

One sometimes got the feeling that, somehow, these poor women were doing an admirable thing, although in its basest form. After seeing how destitute the remainder of the population was, it was hard to feel that the girls weren't justified in earning whatever they could. At nightfall there was gaiety and singing, which contrasted sharply with the life most of the rest of the

country knew. Roads leading to the camps were crowded at night with soldiers holding hands with gingham-clad girls, and one could easily imagine being on a busy street in an American city.

One evening, I visited Shangri-La with an American medical officer to take blood smears to see what percentage of the girls had elephantiasis, sleeping sickness, malarial organisms, and other tropical germs in their systems. Inside one of these villages, one got a four-year college degree all wrapped up in one evening. One harlot, famous for her unabashed demeanor, defiantly walked up to an American medical officer, squatted before him, and nonchalantly urinated on his shoes. I saw aged women, young girls, tall, short, fat, and skinny—many from the hinterland of Liberia. As they lined up to have their fingers pricked, we could see that at least fifty of them were bugling with pregnancy. That same night, a young girl—maybe fifteen years old—had given birth to a baby in her hut. The mother delivered the baby herself with the aid of an attendant. The mother's breasts were as large as grain sacks. She had a combination of elephantiasis and the enlarged breasts that normally accompany pregnancy. The attendant was attempting to wean the baby on warm water. The American officer instructed the attendant to secure condensed milk from the Army commissary and heat that for the newborn.

We saw a mother and her daughter—both pregnant. They probably delivered their babies in the bush, for, at that time, they didn't seem particularly interested in what happened to them. At any rate, childbirth did not cause them to lose many man-days; the youthful mother who had her baby was back to work within a few days. One tiny girl, "Pee Wee," who stood about four feet high and was not more than eleven years old, was expecting her baby within a week. But she continued to accommodate many men up to the time she gave birth.

Naturally, the Liberians in Monrovia became alarmed over the situation. A pointed editorial was printed in the *African Nationalist* on August 14, 1943:

LARGE NUMBER OF EXPECTANT MOTHERS IN ARMY PROSTITUTION CAMP:

SOCIAL PROBLEM FOR LIBERIAN GOVERNMENT

“There are over thirty (at that time) expectant mothers at the prostitution camp at Roberts Field, base of the American Fighting Force, it is reported. If this report is true, it will mean a major social problem for the Liberian Government such as never presented itself to the nation in the nearly one hundred years of history. These children, should they be brought into the world, would be without fathers—a very great handicap to start with from the very beginning of their lives’ journey.

“There are talks about plans to establish a clinic for these unfortunate victims of war, but even if this were done, it would be only the beginning of a very long chain of social and economic responsibilities. The children will have to be taken care of up to adolescence and in many cases after. The question is: upon whom will this burden fall?”

I have never been able to determine what happened to the babies after birth. It was too much of a hush-hush affair. Whenever a health officer was asked about the babies, he would cough, turn red, and walk off. No one wanted to be heard talking about it.

The large number of pregnancies was something most anyone should have expected for wherever war goes, illegitimate babies are always left in the wake. In Germany, the lot of many “super babies” differed in that they were the official government policy of encouraging illegitimacy to keep up the country’s birth rate. Soldiers going off to the war were urged to do their best to procreate, whether married or not. The Nazi government promised to care for its illegitimate war babies and to respect unwed German mothers.

The personal beauty of the dusky belles of Shangri-La and Paradise was never like that of the South Sea Island girls romanticists tell of. Yet, in a country so disease-ravaged and ill-fed, Americans were especially struck by the physical strength of both

sexes of Liberians. The features of the girls were often marred by tribal markings etched deeply into their faces. Their natural color, ranging from high mulatto to deep black, appeared fascinating to Americans, who were also startled by the girls' naked simplicity. The red-beaded G-string was standard dress and went well with mud-based mascaras of red, yellow, blue, white, and pink. Their teeth, though dazzlingly white, often ached and were decayed. Their bodies sometimes contained voluntary mutilations or fantastic display of color, usually demoting their tribe. For example, Geesi girls filed their beautiful teeth to pin-point sharpness. Bassa girls characteristically had a "V" filed in their front, upper teeth. One deformity lacking among the native women was stooped shoulders. At least 99 percent of them had graceful carriages, probably due to their carrying burdens on their heads—rather than in them, as one wiseguy remarked.

The girls of Shangri-La and Paradise painted their bodies with riverbank mud to the joy of their pleased American friends. To them, the "new fashion" in America of painting legs was old stuff. For some 20,000 years, native women had plied the arts of painting and tattooing their bodies. Tattoos were used to create hideous facial designs and welts. Aborigines used paint to cover their entire bodies. Like the tribesmen of old, the present-day natives tattooed and painted themselves for social and religious, as well as decorative purposes. They also believed that various blends of mud made their skin soft, so that when they went to court males, they would be more bewitching. To Americans, the paint had the opposite effect. They made a standing rule that mud would not be worn in their presence. Soldiers found that even though the paint produced bizarre effects, the "painted clothes" wore off easily. During the heat of the day, much paint chips off, making it necessary to recoat. Soldiers riding down a jungle road commonly saw natives crouching nonchalantly beside the river bank, helping one another on with these liquid "garments," which were bound to fit perfectly.

The style of the paint used by the women depended on their age, marital status, and tribe. None of us knew who had priority on the color and design scheme, but it did appear that the youngest girls got the loudest colors and screwiest designs. With skilled hands, they applied the velvety goo to one another, singing and giggling fretfully. Some covered themselves completely with a chalky mixture, which came in a dozen shades. Others covered only their faces and breasts, often creating grotesque patterns on the latter. Some painted their legs, relying on eight to ten colored G-strings to further protect them from the elements. Some wore paint on their foreheads for curing headaches. Green paste was said to drive away headaches; yellow to cure malaria; and pink stuff did just about anything a medicine man could do.

While the girls made a big event of painting themselves, admission was always free. They had no bathroom floor to worry about—just a whole jungle river to themselves. When the paint wore away, a new applicant was applied over the old. With this plaster caked on the maidens' faces, it gave them a ghastly appearance.

There were some natives who wore clothes as a matter of wealth—the more they wrapped around themselves, the richer they were. (This is certainly not a concept foreign to the West.) But the muddy raiments seemed to provide pride and dignity. Painted "Sweater Girls"—as the Americans called them—were willing to pose indefinitely (with a little cash for inducement). "Take me fo-to. Take my fo-to," they would plead. If a photographer took a picture of a native girl and failed to dash them with a print, the model would become indignant, and it would be easier next time to sculpt them rather than take another snapshot. Of all the American luxuries the native girls craved, photos of themselves ranked second (behind pleasant-smelling American toiletries).

Dancing was the spice of the African natives' life. For some reason, if the girls were painted with gaudy, dizzying patterns,

they gave out more energy and often danced into the wee hours of the morning. Ask any World War II soldier who tried to sleep in Liberia. He could hear all night long natives screaming and drums booming—right up to Reveille time.

A High-Ranking Visitor to the Bordello

On one occasion, a high-ranking diplomat who shall remain nameless flew in from Washington and was greeted at the airport.

"How are your women?" he asked the troops. "Great," one soldier responded. "Want to visit them?"

"Sure," the visitor said, jumping into a jeep. A corporal asked, "Where to?"

"You know better than me," the diplomat said. Off they drove to Shangri-La. The diplomat tipped the corporal and told him to take off on foot, leaving the jeep for the diplomat's use.

Meanwhile, back at headquarters, word got around that a high-ranking official was socializing with a black prostitute in an Army bordello. When the general heard about it, he blew his stack.

"Get that idiot out," he bellowed. "Get that idiot out of that compound right now! I'll have that bird court-martialed."

An MP asked me to drive over to Shangri-La and get the diplomat the heck out of there. I made haste.

I arrived to find the VIP running out of a hut half-dressed. "The old man is gunning for you," I told him. That was all he needed to hear. The big man from the States hopped into his commandeered jeep, drove to Roberts Field Airport, and climbed aboard a waiting plane.

His worries with the Army may have been over, but he could have picked up something a lot worse in the bordello.

Good-bye—No More Belles to Ring

It was a sad day for the belles of Shangri-La and Paradise when the battalion left for a new station. As the troops were loading boats to carry them from the Port of Marshall to the transport unit two miles offshore, nearly a hundred sobbing native girls bade them farewell. One private who had married a jungle girl decided he would not leave Liberia with the troops, but he would instead stay with his wife. He awakened early in the morning, left his company at about 5:30 A.M., hiked to the Farmington River, and paid a native fifty cents to carry him in a canoe past Fish Creek gate, which was normally swarming with MPs. He walked up to Division forty-five of the Firestone Plantations, then caught a ride to Monrovia-Salala Road, where he caught the "shilling bus" to Monrovia.

Military Police trailed him to Vai Town, across the water from Monrovia. In an effort to shorten the chase, the MPs visited the hut of the Vai chief; for if anyone could help them, he could. The chief sent for the soldier's wife, but before she came, the soldier presented himself, saying "Okay, let's go." He gave his wife \$300 before being sent to the stockade at Roberts Field.

The soldier was court-martialed, convicted of desertion with intent to shirk hazardous duty. The maximum penalty for the offense was death, but he got off slightly easier. He was sentenced to a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all his pay, and confinement at hard labor for five years. He also lost his citizenship—and was a man without a country.

One technical sergeant owed a girl from Shangri-La seventy-five dollars and she went into a tantrum when he refused to pay the bill. She attempted to leap on the invasion barge. Her ex-boyfriend shouted, "Don't cry, baby. There's more comin' on the next boat."

Voodoo Bows to the Jitterbug

One of the ways the fighting men kept from cracking under the strain of jungle living—particularly after a hard week's work, which might have included anything from digging a drainage ditch to skinning bush cows—was by attending Saturday night dances where they could "cut a little rug." A bevy of curvaceous belles from Shangri-La and Paradise, and some from Monrovia, were transported via Army trucks for these parties, which were given strictly for the black troops. The "hep-kittens," who were unable to speak a word of English only last year, arrived dressed in the best cotton prints in the land; whereas only months before they wore nothing but the least. These dazzling creatures had even more appeal when ornamented in their prize possessions: lipsticks, earrings, perfumes, and high-heeled shoes, all of which had been imported from the States.

Each company had a place on the party roster. The soldiers did their best to festoon the recreation halls with palms, leaving a special place for the orchestra—one of the best Negro Army orchestras to be had anywhere. According to a *Yank* magazine write-up describing the dances, "The mess sergeant trots out the fatted calf and does the chop up somewhat mellow: Sandwiches, cakes, pies, cookies, candies, beer, sodas, and all the trimmings." Military police, armed to the teeth, stood by to make sure that peace was maintained at all times, and that no one winked at violations.

The dancing belles, quiet first, soon became jive cats with itchy feet who learned to dance the Madame La Zonga, Viennese Waltz and Boogie Woogie tap routine in four easy lessons.

It was an awesome thing to see. One would never guess that just a few months before, most of these girls did nothing but primitive voodoo dances to the pulsing rhythm of tom-toms and tambourines back in the African wilderness. They made the change from tribal dancing to rumba without a hitch. Jive became a universal language they could speak fluently, and they never wanted to perform again their voodoo dances of the past.

As soon as the girls arrived at the wilderness camps' dance halls, the band swung out and the hep cats and their kittens were off into space, consuming fabulous amounts of energy in a hot, sticky climate. After an hour or so of heated jitterbugging, a prize was given to the best couple. The dances, run with all the smoothness and decency of any sockhop in the States, finished up at 10:00 P.M. The happy native girls were often, by that time, so much in love they could hardly say "good night." The Army trucks lined up with Military Police acting as chaperons to take the jungle Cinderellas back to their bamboo huts for a sound night's sleep. After the trucks pulled out, the welter of noises could be heard fading into the jungle.

The Brutal Practice

Perhaps the most fascinating feature about the girls of Shangri-La and Paradise was their ability to accommodate so many men without showing any signs of fatigue. It was touched upon previously that the Americo-Liberian girls did not undergo the barbaric practice of clitoridectomy—the removal of the clitoris. This explains why Americo-Liberians were preferred to bush girls. The brutal practice of removing part of the female sex organs—which continues in some parts of the world to this day—is one of the most bizarre rituals ever performed.

Dr. George Harley, who had been a medical missionary in Liberia for more than two decades—and who was probably the greatest authority in the land, with the possible exception of his wife—informed those of us who visited his dispensary of many startling facts. According to Dr. Harley, after entrance into the Poro bush (the bush school for male children), a bit of juice from a certain plant was rubbed on the young boy's penis to create intense itching and to minimize the pain. The foreskin is then cut with a razor and the juice of another vine is squeezed into the wound. A leaf is then wrapped around as a bandage and remains in place for four days.

The removed foreskins are saved, dried and turned over to the women who conduct the Gri-Gri bush (the bush school for girls). In a similar manner, these women save and dry the clitorises and labia minors cut from the young girls' bodies and turn them over to the Poro men. After three days, the removed female organs are cut up into fine pieces and cooked in a soup called

"*teni*," which is eaten by the boys. The purpose of this is to promote healing. The girls eat a similar soup made from the dried foreskins of the boys.

Circumcision of the males was a preliminary to the scarification of tribal marks. With the Mano tribe, for instance, the markings consisted of rows of tiny double scars running around the neck, down the chest, around the side to meet in the middle of the back, then up again to the neck. These supposedly represented the tooth marks of a great crocodile or python spirit, made when he ate the boys (who were said to remain in his belly until the time came at the end of the Poro session when he gave them rebirth).

It was because of the clitoridectomies that the bush girls were known as being more frigid than the Americo-Liberians, and thus not generally preferred. Because the ruthless custom of removing the clitoris deprived the females of sexual gratification, it was widely denounced as being the most savage of all native rites. An understanding of this brutal, painful Devil Bush treatment was necessary to carrying out the Army's venereal disease program. The removal of parts of the female organs not only caused desensitization of the tissues of the girl, but also affected the flow of vaginal secretions. This in turn caused condoms to tear or rupture, admitting diseases.

The brutality of the operation was reinforced by the many fatalities in which it resulted. Girls underwent the procedure anywhere from ages four through twelve. The cutting was usually performed by female doctors in the girls' schools, although many tribes on the Gold Coast hired the services of the local blacksmith.

At the cutting stage, the girls were praised if they were still virgins. Those who had lost their chastity were often made fun of. A non-virgin's parents were usually charged a higher fee for the procedure than a virgin's, since it was felt that the parents were responsible for the girl's loss of virginity. While some tribes

did not prescribe to the practice, many West African native girls were forced to undergo clitoridectomies before being old enough to marry; the purpose being to discourage the girls from having premature sexual relations. The ideal cutting time was generally believed to be when a girl's breasts began to fully develop. This explains why sex-starved Americans often sought to purchase young virgins anywhere from eight years old on up—before they submitted to the Devil Bush ordeal. Interestingly, girls who feared intercourse with native males before being cut often consented to sex with Americans, thinking there was a difference in who stole their virginity.

Captain R.S. Rattray of the Gold Coast Political Society described the cutting ceremony: A man sat down beneath the shade of a tree and the girl to be operated on sat down before him and stretched out her legs. The "*pukubega*" (operator) squatted down between the girl's legs, facing her. He took his left hand and covered the girl's front with it, to prevent those looking on from seeing it. He removed his hand only to run his fingers along the ground to prevent them from slipping. He then quickly took hold of the part to be cut and severed it. The woman standing in witness raised the shrill Kyenkyelese cry to make the girl's heart strong, that she might not cry out on account of the pain. The girl struggled, but she was held firmly in place by the *pukubega*. After a while, the dazed girl was allowed to go.

The practice has changed little where it is still performed. It is estimated that untrained traditional birth attendants perform two-thirds of the procedures these days, according to a 1994 report compiled for UNICEF by Sara Mansavage. These practitioners, she writes, "typically have limited knowledge of health and hygiene and often use inadequately cleaned traditional instruments." As a result, side effects include "trauma, bleeding and hemorrhage, pain, stress and shock; infections (which can be fatal); painful and difficult sexual relations; obstructed labor and

difficult childbirth; and psychological trauma. The effects can last a lifetime.”

While this cruel custom supposedly served to discourage early sexual intercourse and to encourage prenuptial chastity, even Captain Rattray argued that it should be outlawed. “It should not be beyond the ingenuity of the schools and missionary bodies,” he declared, “to make use of and adopt the good precepts which this otherwise barbaric rite enjoins upon its initiates.”

Sometimes the grim surgery of clitoridectomy was followed by infibulation—the stitching together of the vaginal opening and insertion of a small tube to allow the passage of urine and blood.

U.N. physician Dr. Charlotte Gardner was quoted as saying more than 100 million women today have been forced to undergo this barbaric procedure—making it currently the most widespread violation in the world. She said it is an accepted practice in twenty-six African nations, three Middle Eastern nations, and in some part of Asia.

“It’s impossible to say how widespread it is in this country),” said Lisa Moreno, an assistant to former Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo., who introduced legislation in 1993 outlawing the practice in the U.S.

Columbia University Professor Dr. Nahib Toubia is on record as saying that most American politicians and the media have ignored the issue because it doesn’t affect many women in the U.S.—yet.

“It’s a pathetic state of affairs that the American media won’t bother with an issue unless it is a problem in this country,” said Toubia, a native of Sudan, where female circumcision is commonly practiced. “It is a violation of human rights, the infliction of physical injury and it is a bad thing that everyone should be working to stop.”

While it is often attributed to religious edict, female genital mutilation, as the practice is more commonly known these days,

is sanctioned by neither Islam nor Christianity. Accordingly, many countries' high courts have ruled the ritual cutting of the clitoris and other parts of young women's genitalia is not a true religious practice.

Delivering Babies

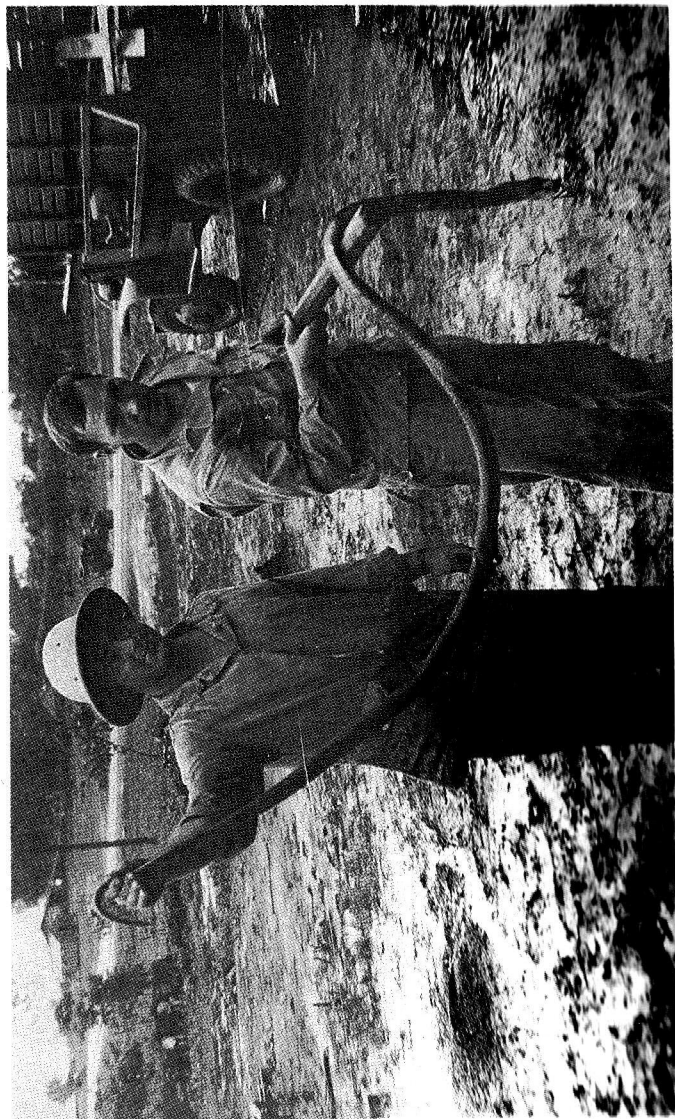
When it comes to delivering babies, Dr. Harley believed the native African midwives had a good idea of "what not to do." They helped by staying out of the way, doing little more than holding hands with the pregnant woman, and making her walk about. When the pains became severe, they would pull on the mother-to-be's breasts. The midwife sometimes squatted before the patient as she was held in a half-reclining position on the floor, propped up from behind by an assistant. As the midwife squatted, she spit on her hands, ran them together, then put them under the patient's armpits. Then she would bring them forward and downward. The midwife would get a good hold and shake the patient gently from side to side with a slight twisting motion. She would then drag her hands down toward the pubic area and, without touching the vulva, shake her hands vigorously in front. This helped only in that it gave the midwives something to do at a time when there was little to be done.

At the very end of labor, the patient was given a big whiff of snuff, which caused violent sneezing. Some midwives would try to help the patients by lifting them onto their backs and walking around, hoping the shaking and jostling would induce labor.

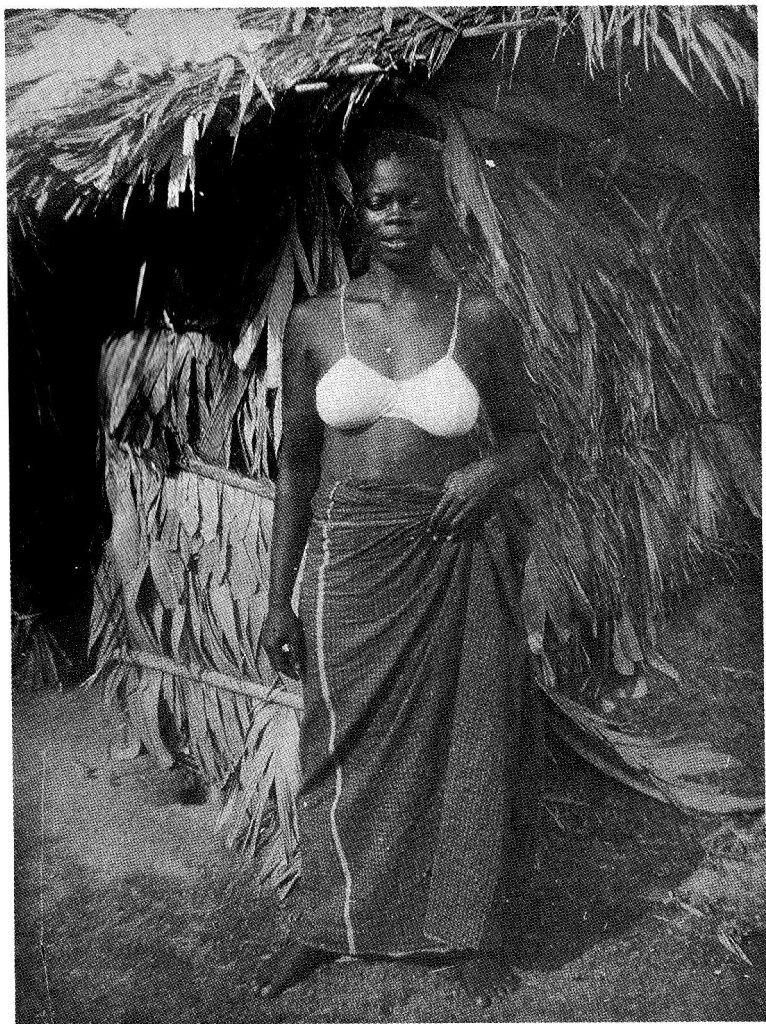
Children were nursed until they could walk without help. Sometimes the mother had too little milk, and it was not uncommon to see a child "tugging" at empty breasts. About a year after birth, the feeding of ricewater and rice, and sometimes cassava, was started. A tonic for weak babies was the juice of a certain plant squeezed into the baby's eyes. Some women sixty years old could produce milk at will.

Delivering a baby was fairly common procedure that almost every native girl knew—thanks to early schooling in the Devil Bush society. In line with African thinking in some tribes, following the birth of a baby, the afterbirth was placed in a small, clay urn in which a hole had been made. With the afterbirth was placed a section of the umbilical cord, about three inches long. The urn and its contents were then buried outside the hut.

Severing the naval cord seemed to be a mutilating process. Some natives had umbilical cords rupture, which caused their belly buttons to extend several inches and curve downward. Once the naval cord was severed, a family member salved the remaining cord with palm oil ointment until it sloughed off. The naval string was then put inside a shell and hung on a wall. Thus, the number of shells hung from the wall indicated the number of children born in the hut.



Black Mamba, world's deadliest snake, killed by troops who found it in their encampment.



An African girl in American dress.



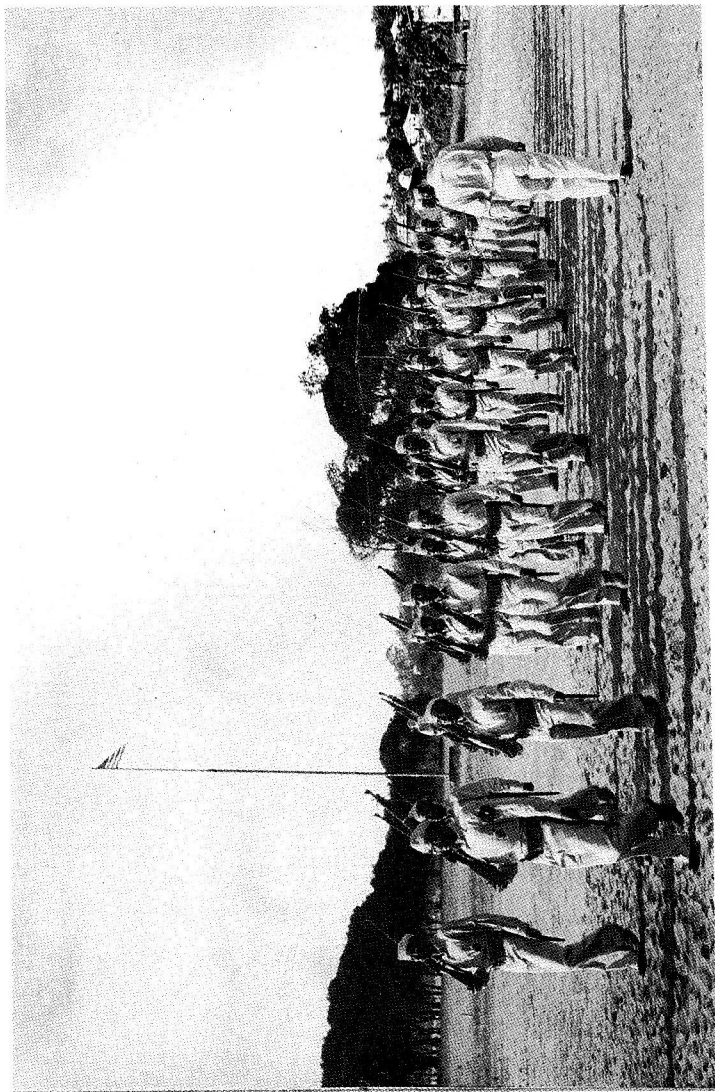
The Belles of Shangri-La on Laundry day!



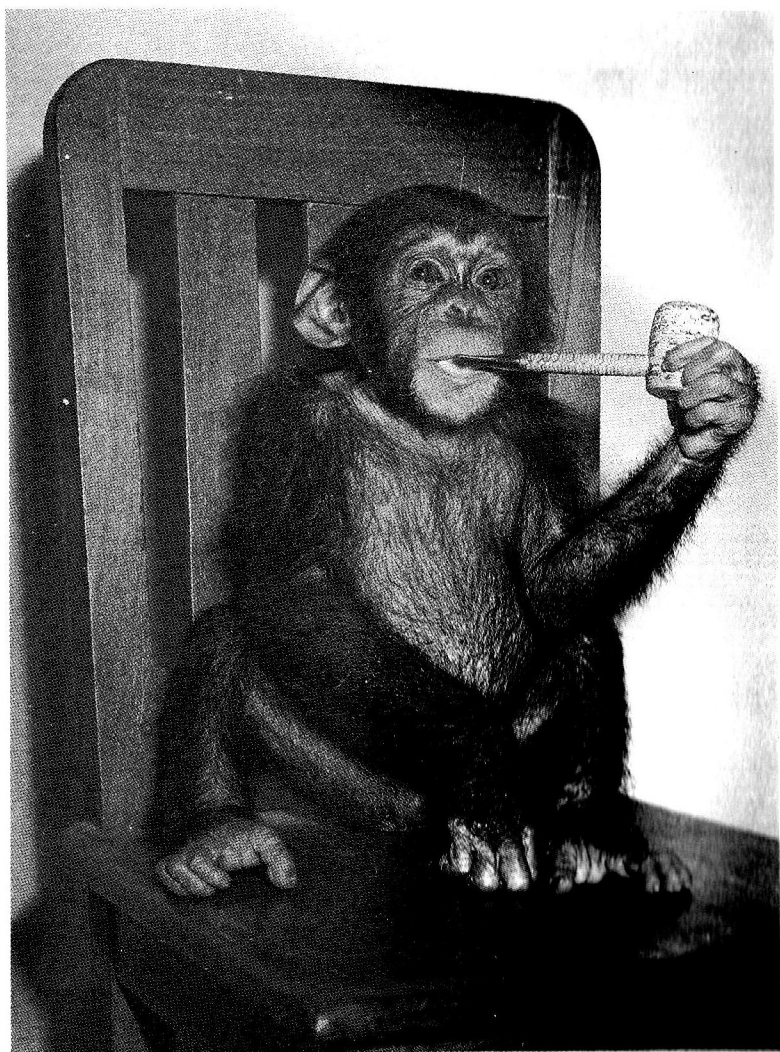
Native Snake Society putting on a "Tumbling" act.



The Native Snake Society entertained both local villagers and U.S. troops alike.



American troops training local recruits into the Liberian Army.



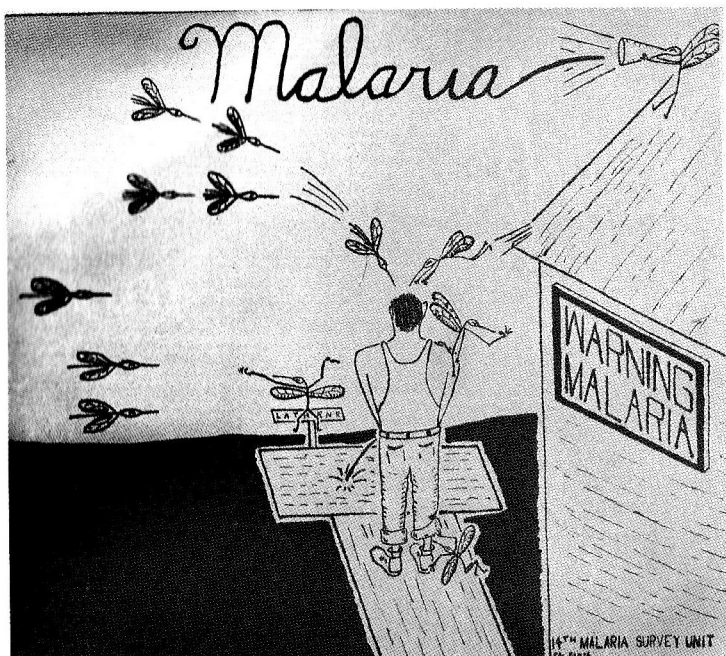
Billy-O our mascot, had all the habits of the other troops.



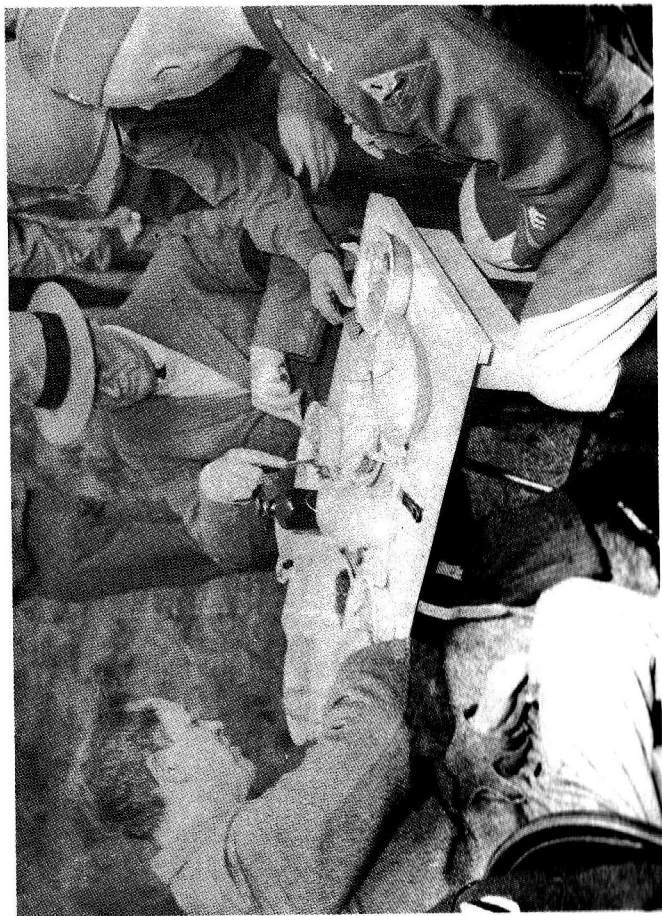
President Roosevelt shakes hands with President Barclay in Monrovia.



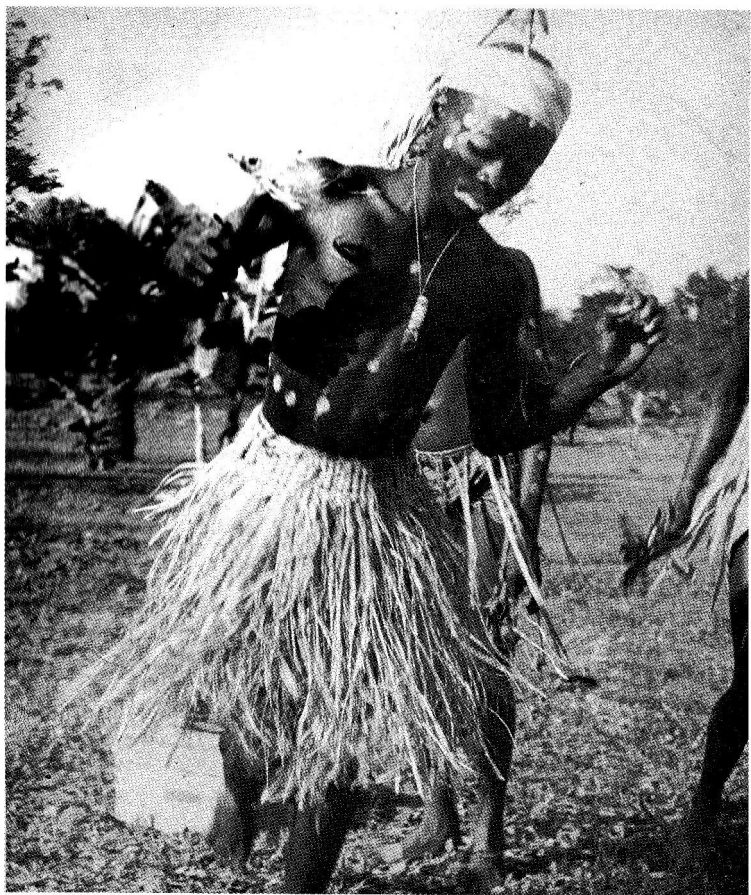
Native drums, known as "talking drums," were loud enough to send messages from one village to another.



Anti-malaria poster reminding soldiers of the constant threat of mosquitoes.



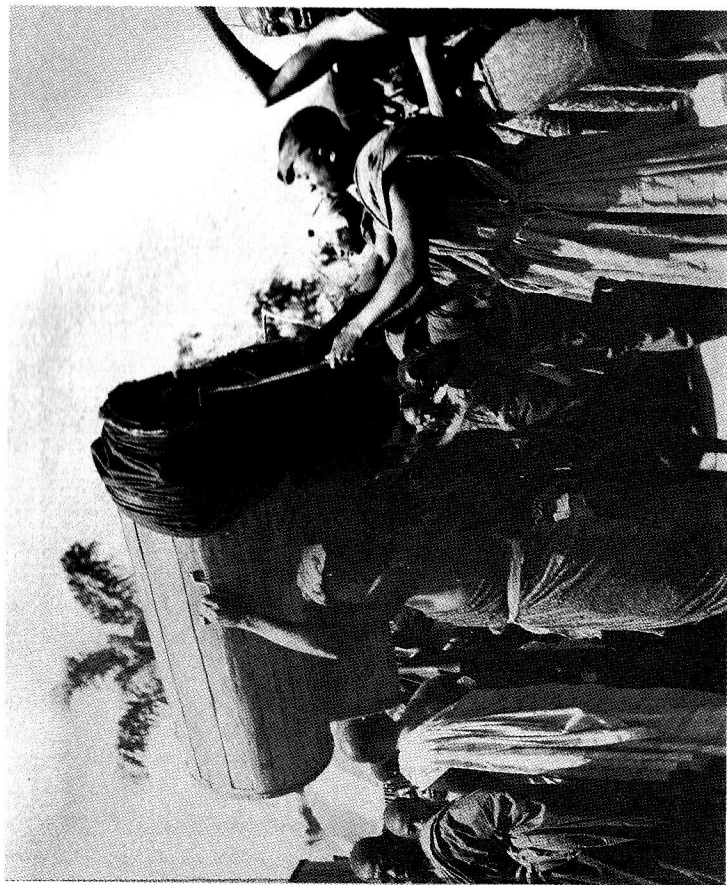
President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Harry Hopkins have a "roadside" picnic in Rabat, Morocco.



A local medicine man, known as a "witch doctor," putting on a dance for troops.



U.S. Sergeant T-3 Bill Maser of Johnstown, PA saved dozens of soldiers' lives one day as they were unloading hand grenades from a barge. He noticed smoke issuing from one of the crates and threw the crate into the river, resulting in a massive explosion. No lives were lost.



Tom tom drums sending messages throughout the jungle.



Native mechanics take time off to match coins.



We made our own Christmas cards.

Love Is One Game that Was Never Called on Account of "Darkness"

In times of war, the baser passions of the human race are loosened to a considerable degree. While the white detachment of our Task Force has no such "comforting" provisions as Shangri-La and Paradise, they did rely on the native system of pimping. The men made frequent nocturnal visitations into the bush to keep from going "wacky in khaki," as they called it, or "nervous in the service." At least 90 percent of the white troops turned what they called "color blind" after a prolonged absence from white women, and they sought comfort in nearby villages such as "Talking Charlie," "December," and "Jazzy-No-Pay."

War played grim pranks on the carnal minds of many white men who left the states as virgins and would end up with their chastity sold to coffee-colored bush girls. Many of the men built flimsy, thatched houses and hired black girls for \$6 a month to keep them off the base. These verminous huts were made of pole frames bound together with sheaves of flat thatch leaves. This type of construction provided excellent harborage for lice, rats, cockroaches and other pests. Rarely rainproof and never containing adequate ditching to provide water runoff, the earthen floors and trails from hut to hut were perennially wet and slimy. Anopheles mosquitoes bred profusely in water-holding depressions and infected 100 percent of the native population and anyone else who got in their way. These villages were destroyed by the Army, but they sprung up again—closer and closer to the military reservation. The girls who inhabited them broke the monotony of service.

The gloom-ridden white troops were warned to beware of the tricks their eyes played on them in the tropics. Africa was said to be the only place where native girls "turned white" to those of the opposite hue. A soldier once made a drawing illustrating how native girls turned white in the mind of white Americans after six months' duty. The sketches showed the shade of the native's complexion in each of six stage from "black as the ace of spades" in the first to "practically white" in the sixth. Some boys, however, were not at all addicted to "color blindness" but professed that, "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice."

Love is one game that is never called on account of "darkness." Whenever a replacement would come into the white detachment, one of the first things he would inquire about was the status of the girls. Love-starved soldiers became bug-eyed when told, "Plenty of girls around here, but they are very choosy! They want to look into your family history to make sure there is no insanity in your family." Another favorite line was to tell recruits that the girls were fussy about men having body odor and, before they would associate with them, they would test for this embarrassing condition by sniffing under the armpits. But after the greenhorns mingled with the aborigines on a hot, summery day, they realized there wasn't much truth to the BO story.

Attitudes of the day being what they were, many white troops had mixed feelings about consorting with their African brides. Some would admit to feeling shameful and wicked upon returning to camp and removing their torn clothing from their soaked, sweaty skin. One was heard to say, "When I got through with that black bitch, the first thing I wanted to do was choke the life out of her." Invariably, he would make a return visit the next night.

Shame was the least of men's worries—especially among those whose penises were so contaminated as to be doomed forever, gradually eaten away, beyond the help of medical science.

Still others saw their organs swell to the size of grapefruit as a result of infection.

Interestingly, it was those white men who did the most crying about their wives being untrue back home who made the most frequent visits into the bush. One white soldier received a telegram from America informing him his wife's baby had arrived. The soldier, pleased at having fathered a child, scurried into the bush to celebrate.

The majority of white troops had their own clandestine brides. Two of my friends took me to their hut on the outskirts of "Talking Charlie." It was a cozy home, with stuccoed walls (mud from huge ant hills), which were lined with at least fifty different newspapers from America. The floor was lined with a bamboo mat. There was a comfortable Army bed, a swinging hammock, and two GI kerosene lamps. Payment was made to the girls on the installment plan: \$1.50 a week plus Army canned goods, cigarettes, or woolen Red Cross socks. They became detribalized very quickly and learned to speak pidgin English combined with a Southern drawl-Bassa-Gola-Bronx accent all in unintelligible overtones that even they didn't always understand.

Native girls liked to take the Americans for a ride by professing poverty. I asked one detribalized wife, "You are married?" She merely shrugged her shoulders, saying, "Me no got money to marry." She had a roll of American dollars wedged between her breast. This girl, who was the wife of an American, was formerly the wife of a young chief who had more wives than his sexual powers could keep up with, so he dismissed her. During the day, like other soldiers' wives, she spent most of her time fixing her hair and applying clay paints to her skin so that it would be more lovely to touch when her husband came home from duty at camp. Like the Shangri-La belles, she too could dance American style.

Difficult Conditions

Anyone who visited a typical native village where white troops often spent their evenings could not help but wonder what war was to cause minds to forget the value of cleanliness. Some of the villages were windswept clean. But the villages that weren't visited by breezes usually stunk to high heaven. Native men would sit around, smoking clay pipes, while wrinkled women with shriveled breasts bent over at right angles, cooking dinner over an acrid, smokey fire. Girls sat on a dirt floor, legs crossed, fixing one another's hair. And whenever a hairdresser found a louse, she would snare it with thumb and forefinger and pop it into her mouth. We saw an Army wife cleaning rats killed in a warehouse while her brother stewed others in palm oil. They smelled like burnt elephant flesh. Off to the west of a bamboo shack, one could see four scrawny, white-baked chickens fighting and tugging fiercely over a spent condom, which they thought was edible. Small native boys used to collect condoms and use them for the balloons, chewing gum and objects for floating down the stream. It was not uncommon to see, beside a native hut, rotting fish flesh and cartilage, or rat entrails mouthed and explored by toddlers or gnawed by huge jungle rats during the night. Such were the conditions of the Liberian native.

Regardless of the tribe, the natives had a repulsive, powerful body odor, which smelled like moldy leather. Under the grueling sun, they sweated profusely and beads of perspiration trickled down their naked sides. Being passionately fond of dried sea food, they also acquired a fishy odor, which sometimes smelled up the entire village. Girls bathed three or four times daily to remove the stench. Soap was what they wanted more than anything else, and they often preferred it to Spam, GI shoes, or even cigarettes. The Americans who bought wives furnished them with soap, toothbrushes, and other toiletries. So the savage spectacle

that prevailed before the troops arrived was, in some cases, transformed into a more acceptable finery, at least to Western sensibilities.

Yankees' Hanky-Panky

Many hand-picked handmaidens had beauteous, youthful, pliant forms, though others had natural deformities such as six-inch belly buttons. They possessed blue-pink lips, full and well-rounded. Their skin was soft and brown and smooth, the latter thanks to mollifying palm oils. The prevalence of hideous blemishes from tattooing suggested that the natives underwent considerable torture to acquire such mystical designs on their faces and chests.

In the course of a single evening, two bush girls could meet the needs of our entire company. The base contained a long, thatch-roofed shed with side walls, supported by gnarled posts. This shed was used during the day by natives who washed soldiers' clothes. At night it was the rendezvous spot for native girls and lust-starved troops. Soldiers waiting in line would gesture and giggle, turning flashlights on those enjoying temporary bliss. One evening, an active girl accommodated twenty-five men without showing the slightest sign of fatigue. Being a bush girl, she could go through with the grueling experience, whereas an Americo-Liberian, whose sex organs had not been tampered with, would have suffered great discomfort.

* * *

The men in our detachment missed a meal of C-rations one noon when two cooks and a mess sergeant were lured into the jungle by three grinning native girls who suddenly poured out from behind a bush near the mess shed. The cooks, overjoyed at

the prospects of fulfilling their emotions, let their carnal instincts run away from them. Forgetting what they left cooking, they returned to find the hash was burned to a crisp. To satisfy the growing clamor of hungry men, they explained that the field stove had exploded, burning the chow.

* * *

One Sunday afternoon, we stumbled upon two soldiers in "December" village, where they had undergone a gruesome experience. One of the white troops had remained in a hut with a girl for about three hours, the other spent an entire night, and neither of them realized there was a corpse standing in one corner, staring right at them. The corpse was that of a young girl who had been dead for about three days. She had been prepared for burial, which was to have taken place within the next few days or so. Naked, her body was rubbed with palm oils and other native-made ointments until she was glassy and stiff, as if frozen solid. She stood in a semi-lighted corner, unnoticed by anyone. Her well-kept body indicated that natives knew something about the art of embalming. Said one of the soldiers: "That broke me out of the habit of touching these girls. I'm through." He was—for keeps.

* * *

Sometimes, if native girls refused to let certain white men enter their huts, they would pay for their stubbornness with their homes. They also might suffer the consequences if they did let certain men in. One American, called "Rebel," was a hell-raising sort of demon whose response to one native who displeased him made him infamous. When he found his girl was entertaining another American soldier, Rebel saw red, rushed to the back of the bamboo hut, flicked his cigarette lighter and held the flame against the wall's dry palm leaves. Another soldier put the fire

out, but Rebel repeated the act on the other side of the shack. This time, the flames continued to rage. Soldiers in shorts and cussing native girls came fleeing like mice from the burning hut.

* * *

Some money-wise girls took advantage of African myth and voodooism and applied pressure on superstitious soldiers who were free with money. The girls, with a supposedly working knowledge of casting spells and bewitching people, threatened to cast the evil eye—a curse said to make the victim go mad from loss of speech. One soldier refused to fall for the threats of a clever girl to whom he owed \$50. Before he shipped out, he told her he would never return and that if she wanted to make him into a cat, now was the time. She flashed a set of hypnotic bangles made from leopards' teeth and, in her native Bassa tongue, attempted to abracadabra him into a trance. He then pretended to suddenly become mute and groggy. Surprised, she inched toward him, hoping to rummage through his pockets. He seized her quickly and gave a deafening shout into her ear. Her powers to bewitch had failed, so she picked up a bucket of rainwater and doused him with it.

* * *

At least two white soldiers in our company were proud papas. Both had babies, whom they were supporting at the village of "Kissy-no-Pay." The babies were nursed along on condensed milk stolen from the Army.

The High Cost of Loving

One Sunday afternoon, that village of "Talking Charlie" was buzzing with excitement. There was a powwow over the

prices women were charging white boys. Some were getting as much as \$15 on the "black" market and it was not uncommon to see a young girl—a "Tee-Tee"—fumbling through a cow-choking roll of bills. One of the American boys, drunk on jungle juice, complained to the mayor, Talking Charlie himself, saying it was time for a ceiling price. The soldier, a husky Texan, approached the shriveled, asthmatic mayor and held before him a shiny Carolina Maneuver medal he'd earned during his Army days stateside.

"Charlie, you see this badge?" he asked. "Well, this means that as long as you take good care of us boys, and don't let the girls charge us too much, white man no burn down house to catch mosquitoes."

Talking Charlie, raising his gnarled hands above his head, jumped back in alarm. He knew whenever a village was burned by a "mosquito crew"—bug chasers—it meant work for him and his people, and he wasn't in the mood to start building another village; not at his age.

He gathered together his haremful of belles—all the women, young and old—and summoned his sagacious witch doctor who constantly mumbled his desire to practice medicine in the States. The head women of each household had a part as chief counselors. The decision was not reached without heated wrangling. The men were in favor of their daughters charging less. So were the unmarried males, for since the American troops arrived, they were paying higher prices for their social entertainment. Eventually, the ceiling price of \$1 was set and Talking Charlie was presented with the shiny medal, a gift that caused his eyes to nearly pop. So long as he had the medal (and would keep the girls from charging exorbitant prices), his huts would be spared the flame of what he called the "mosquito bad men." The girls were angry about the limit, but they reluctantly accepted the new terms. Some went on strike for a day or two, but it was not long before the soldiers won back their friendship.

Everybody's Favorite GI

One white soldier, a curly-haired Italian boy known as "Humby-Zombie Jackson," was the favorite among the native boys and girls, who regularly paid tribute to him. Jackson was an American object of African reverence. His friendly spirit, beaming personality, and willingness to mix with the chiefs of villages and their girls won him the reputation of being the "man with a thousand wives." Jackson, although the ugliest of all us Americans, was the only one who got along with Madame Hodge (who owned more seductive prostitutes than any other madam in Monrovia) and he constantly wrangled with her Americo-Libarian girls.

"Gimme dem bush girls any day," he would tell Nellie.

"You go to them," Nellie would angrily respond, "and come back to me with a fever in yo belly."

Jackson's name preceded him like magic throughout the Liberian bush. Whenever he entered a village, it became one immense babble of adulation. He would majestically calm the hubbub with a wave of his hand. Drums throbbed for him and local denizens genuflected. The Italian-American lad, an inveterate bubble gum addict, entertained and delighted the natives by punctuating his speeches with huge bubbles, blown during excitingly impromptu and unexpected moments during his discourse. He may have been lacking in pulchritude, but he made up for this with his simple humor. He was usually amorous in his ways, generous with cigarettes (which he never smoked), and thought little of pulling up a chair in a native hut to wade through a dish of Foo-Foo or Dumboy covered with a powerful fish gravy.

"I do it just to be sociable," he told us. "I can't spit it out. They'd get mad at me."

Whenever Jackson raced his half-track vehicle past a string of natives along the roadside, they would yell in high-pitched voices: "Helllllooo, goo fran, Jack!" And whenever he trekked

to a village (which was often), he was met with joyful shouts as boys and girls rushed down the jungle path to greet him.

“What would me goilfriend say back home if she saw me now,” he’d say sheepishly.

One reason for Jackson’s popularity: his shallow promises to take his wives back to America. One small boy said, “Jack get me job shining shoes.” He had a dressmaking job promised to one girl, and a jeep promised to another.

Jackson became so popular, males began cursing him on sight. If Jackson saw native girls bathing in a creek near a road, he often would pull his jeep to a stop, jump out and help scrub their backs, not to mention other parts of their bodies. Then they would scrub his back. Not many soldiers could get this service—but Jackson could.

He seldom paid for any commodity. One afternoon, four natives came to camp, asking “Where my brother-in-law, Jackson?” They were loaded with bananas and coconuts for him—to show how much they appreciated having him in the household. Whenever a girl tried to make Jackson pay a price, he would be one step ahead of her thanks to a number of clever devices, such as using green pieces of paper cut the size of a one dollar bill. Jackson used to tell his girls, “Me like you. Here, take anudder dollar,” and he wold hand them another piece of dyed paper.

The Army, thinking it could accomplish its mission more quickly, bought scads of cheap, glittering jewelry, which Jackson and other troops passed on to the natives until they became so bedecked with jewelry they would not accept a real gold ring if offered one. The Africans were unbelievably fascinated by these cheap trinkets and, consequently, there were terribly one-sided exchanges made. One soldier sold a \$1 Mickey Mouse watch for \$60. The native was so intrigued, he watched the hand swing to and fro for hours. The tables turned, however, when a crafty native sold a “pink ivory” bracelet to a soldier for \$50. The rare

bracelet turned out to be the junk some other soldier had passed on to the then-unsuspecting tribesman. It came from the States.

Law and Disorder

One of the stranger aspects to come from the whites' mingling with the natives was the latter's dogged belief that Americans were OK regardless of what they did to interfere with native life. One of the oddest love battles that took place during our stay came about between a male and female native as a result of an American's frequent philandering.

It seems that an American troop was in the habit of waking up at 2:00 A.M., calling on his girl in the bush and entertaining her in his thatch-roofed abode. The couple were rudely interrupted one night when the woman's native husband poked his head through an opening and played a flashlight on the clinched couple. The American was not alarmed by the intrusion, but his mistress, who was dearly in love with him, could not tolerate such tomfoolery. The next day she set out to have the intruding husband arrested. She was successful. He was thrown in jail for thirty days and fined \$22. In most cases, native males did not object too strenuously if their wives had relations with white Americans, but it broke their hearts if their wives dallied with men of their own color.

* * *

Living in a remote jungle outpost could bring out the worst in men. If one didn't remain on guard, all inhibitions could be lost.

One evening, about two o'clock, I was in bed when I heard a commotion. Peeking out from under my mosquito netting, I saw at least fifteen soldiers lined up for sexual favors provided

by one sorry lieutenant. I recalled he was the same officer who had entertained some of the boys in the troop ship on the way over.

When you consider the lack of bathing facilities we had, you can see why sex to me was undesirable anywhere. I was tempted many times, but, having seen the naked bodies of both men and women, I was convinced I was better off leaving it alone. But the conditions didn't bother some troops, black and white. The prevailing attitude for many was, *I won't get back alive, so what's the difference?*

We later learned that the gay lieutenant was considered "sick" and sent back to the States for treatment.

Off Limits

It was upsetting to natives whenever white troops were arrested for being off limits, so they resolved to prevent these arrests. Whenever the MPs raided the native villages, "friendly" native guards would send messengers ahead to tip off the soldiers. This caused much annoyance to the police officers because the more heads they lugged into the stockade, the greater prestige they acquired.

But the troops hit upon a better method of warning their fellow soldiers who were prowling in villages plainly marked "off limits." Whenever someone put a telephone call through to the Provost Marshall that so many men were seen in a village, and that a party of MPs should be quickly dispatched to arrest them, the switchboard operator would listen with open ears. He then became the key man in keeping the wayward troops out of the stockade. When the call came through to arrest the men, the dialogue between the telephone operator and the MP would go something like this.

OPERATOR: "Did your party answer yet?"

MP: "Hello? Hello? No, man, I've been trying to get the Provost Marshall for ten minutes."

OPERATOR: "I'll try again." (*He picks up a magazine and reads for about five minutes.*) "Did they answer yet?"

MP: "Not yet."

The unsuspecting MP had not the slightest notion he was being hoodwinked. Meanwhile, a native messenger was well on his way to the village to warn the prowlers that MPs would soon be on their way—clear out! After another ten minutes of stalling, the operator would connect the parties, by which time he felt he had done his noble deed for the evening.

This ruse wasn't foolproof, however. One evening, two soldiers who didn't get the signal of approaching MPs were apprehended literally with their pants down. The switchboard operator had dozed off and the MPs suddenly dropped in on "Talking Charlie,"—at midnight. They arrested two soldiers for meandering around in their undershorts. The next day in the stockade, the soldiers maintained they were innocent. Shouted one: "It's a sorry world when a guy can't take photos in a native village without getting arrested." The officer in charge, obviously in a good mood that day, released the men.

Mud and Blood

One quiet Saturday night in the loneliness of the jungle, there was little to do but crawl beneath the mosquito netting and fall asleep. But the peaceful mood was soon broken: a soldier came struggling in, covered with mud and blood.

He had been stabbed, nearly fatally, and as soon as the news spread, the company was buzzing with troops bent on drawing ammunition and tracking down the attacker.

Truth be told, the soldier would not have survived if the old village of "Talking Charlie" hadn't been burned to the ground by District Commissioner Peabody, who didn't appreciate the amount of American money pouring into the village. The fire actually drove the natives closer to the American base, where they erected a series of huts. It was inside one of these huts that the soldier had been knifed. He never would have made it back to camp from the original village without dying from the loss of blood. Even after the relatively short trip from the site of his attack, three pints of plasma needed to be administered.

We later got the story from the wounded soldier.

"I know I didn't have any business in the village at night," he admitted. "But you know how a soldier is. I was inside the shack talking to a girl when this husky, colored soldier, drunk from cane juice, ordered me out. I asked his name, but he just started to walk past me, saying nothing. Then he made a pass at my chest, striking the right side. I left the shack thinking he hit me with his fist. Soon, I knew differently. The blood gushed down my belly. I wanted to warn a couple other white soldiers that a stabber was around, but decided not to. I was getting weaker by the minute."

He gathered up enough strength to carry himself back to camp, then collapsed.

This incident marked the first time since the troops arrived that Army commanders seriously considered the possibility that they might have a racial problem.

Witch Doctor Brings Justice

Trials have always seemed to lure the curious and that was certainly the case in World War II-era West Africa. Long before the O.J. Simpson debacle and Court TV, the typical African would travel many miles to witness a trial. We attended a village trial to determine who killed a baby. This account was written by John Lyle, an officer.

A small, shriveled native approached me.

"I want to see you," he said, "but I see you are busy. So I come later."

He came back later and told me that over in "Big Town" there was going to be a trial. The witch doctor was going to try someone for killing a baby, maybe two babies. This was the opportunity of a lifetime, but I resolved not to go near the witch doctor alone. So shortly after dinner, I asked another officer to go with me. Two others joined us.

We followed the guide, traveling over a narrow path, long and winding, with high jungle walls on each side. Deep into the bush it was dark and wet underfoot. Occasionally, we came to a small clearing where corn, cassava or rice were growing, but we were still in a dense jungle region.

Our guide was named "December"—that's all anybody called him. His was one of many strange and colorful names: "Dumboy," "Poor No Friend," "Blue Moon," "Kiki," "KaKa," and even "Isaac McCooley." "December" led us faithfully into the bush where many enter, but few come out without leaving something. . . .

We came to a stream that only a native could ford unescorted. It cost me ten cents to hold the hand of the guide as he led me safely across the narrow, fifteen-foot-long log. It's amusing to Africans to see Westerners do something as simple as crossing a log.

On the other side of the stream, we had to wait. The stage was not yet set, for the retinue of the witch doctor had not quite entered the town. From where we stood, several of his attendants could easily be seen. The village square could also be seen clearly. The village itself was surrounded by tall bush and a narrow, well-trodden path leading to the square.

The main participants were now entering, but, before we could go in, an emissary gave us a "purified" right of way. He poured oil over the entire length of the gateway, and from his hands, he blew some dust in our direction. When this had evaporated, he bid us—with all the grace of a pharaoh's chamberlain—to enter the village.

From the time we crossed the stream, we heard the strange sounds of the African drum, being beaten as only a native can on an occasion such as this. It was not the familiar rhythm we heard in camp at nights before retiring. Nor was it the tom-tom. It was something else.

A terrible offense had been committed against the dignity of the entire village. Someone was guilty and would have to pay at this open trial. Folks from all the nearby villages had gathered for the spectacle. Some were dressed in American-made clothes, threadbare from fair wear and tear. Most of the women wore wraparounds of bright color, many with rich floral designs. Some breasts were exposed; others partly so. On their heads they wore a bandeau resembling the headdresses worn by Egyptian women.

Still the drums beat. Several were in use. The regulation drum was fitted with two deer skins stretched tightly over each head. The more primitive drums were made of palm stumps and had but one head made of water buffalo leather. These were small enough to be held under the arm and could be beaten with either hand or both hands. For this special occasion, there were also a

small, cylindrical, hollowed-out piece of palm stump. Over this was stretched the skin of a wild deer. Alongside the drum was an opening of about 2 1/2 inches where the drummer played his sticks. There's nothing like that sound anywhere, except in Africa.

Suddenly, the blare of a horn made of wild ox antler brought graveyard silence upon the square. Even members of the barefoot train following the witch doctor stood as wax figures. Another high-pitched sound penetrated our ears, and the witch doctor and his train passed over the trail where we had been.

There he stood: Part man, part devil, part judge, part doctor, and part psychologist. All but eight residents of the village where the crime was committed were present. Those eight were represented by sticks stuck into the ground. These pieces of wood were closely inspected by the powerful witch doctor. He then inspected the crowd. Strangely, after he looked us over, he told one of his group to get us closer to the scene.

Several chiefs stood by. A paramount chief was also present, as was a local government representative. The witch doctor stood, leaning on the shoulder of an aide, much like the illustrations of Christ and John the Baptist. It seemed that the sins of the whole village were on the witch doctor's shoulders. He moved his five-foot, six-inch body forward. . . He wore a headdress made of lion's skin with a red-beaded frontispiece about six inches high. Around the head was a two-inch thick leopard tail, which hung down his back about eighteen inches. At the end of this was fastened a small bell and above it were attached about a dozen tiger teeth at intervals of roughly an inch. His arms were bare, except for an arm-let of palm nuts and small bells around each bicep. Just above his calves were two more bracelets of palm seeds. Around his waist was a skirt of many-colored strands of palm threads.

But the witch doctor's power was not in his costume, nor was it in the drums, nor in what he said. It wasn't in the mirror, which he used to peer at each suspect with his back to them. And his power came not from his devil-like eyes. From what I could see, the witch doctor's only strength was that the people of the village actually believed in him. They believed he could find the person or persons who were guilty.

Through the damp air came another long blast from the horn. Everything was silent, all that could be heard was the crickets. The witch doctor now stood alone, hands on hips. As he moved from the center of the square, the ominous silence was broken by the tingling of the bells around his arms and legs, and those at the tail of his mitten-like headdress. This jingling sound had its own special effect in holding everyone's attention. Like an Army officer who faces soldiers at inspection, the witch doctor moved from left to right, examining each of the suspects. Once this review was completed, the witch doctor faced the drummers and offered a sort of salute to the spirits.

A blast of the horn again pierced the jungle. Again the motley group of suspects was inspected. The countenance of the suspects had now changed. They seem to be inspecting, if not suspecting, the witch doctor. Even the witch doctor noticed this change of attitude, for he seemed worried and impatient. He cut his tour short this time and again faced the drummers. His face had changed completely. There could be no doubt about it. He was upset and taken aback. Was his magic failing him?

Upon entering the village, the witch doctor was preceded by what might be taken as a court jester. But in his new capacity, the servant now seemed to be something of an acolyte. He wore only trunks, no other adornment—not even a feather. In one hand was the horn of a deer and in the other, a long, black-and-white porcupine needle. At a glance from the doctor, this aide, without any ceremony, placed the deer horn and porcupine needle on the ground, side by side, in front of the sticks, which served as proxies for the missing villagers.

The din of the drummers' rhythm increased, faster and faster. The cadence was nerve-wracking. Even the witch doctor could not stand it any longer. His body began to jerk. First a leg moved, then an arm. His head was akimbo and the small bells chimed as the palm beads rattled. His steps increased until he was in a real jungle dance, gyrating around the group of suspected murderers. He was dancing like mad, as if to invite the demon spirits to come to his rescue. It was evident that he was concerned. He stopped

and instantly the drums ceased as he faced the eight sticks. He placed a finger on each of them, one at a time, until the sound of the horn was again heard.

The drums began anew, this time with a long and rapid roll. The witch doctor produced a leopard-skin adorned mirror, which was concealed in the folds of his grass skirt. He turned his back on the accused and looked at them through the mirror. He could read their expressions; some seemed to him guilty, others innocent. Each had to go through the ordeal of the mirror, not even the sticks were excluded. After the first round, he returned to the suspects and after covering the entire group again, he returned to the middle of the assemblage where he faced the civil authorities. As if to say to them, "I have found the guilty one," he allowed the first smile of the afternoon.

His grin was a signal, and the drummers pounded away after three blasts of the horn. The witch doctor began acting wildly, as if he were overcome by a spirit from beyond. His breathing quickened and his entire body perspired as he jerked to and fro. The bells rattled and the rhythm increased, almost to the point of intoxicating madness. The witch doctor leapt straight into the air, letting out an eerie yell. He was wild, mad with laughter. The entire assemblage was awed. The small group of suspects was showing signs of distress, and they began to weaken. They could not get away. Local soldiers with fixed bayonets were on guard and victory was now in sight.

Finally, the witch doctor's histrionics came to an abrupt end. The drums ceased and the witch doctor, standing before the civil authorities, prepared to announce his decision.

Taking up the mirror, he again surveyed the sticks, then shook his head. He pulled up one, then another. There were six sticks remaining. The witch doctor then approached one of the suspects—a rather buxom, older woman—and inspected her via the mirror. After much consideration, he shook his head and pushed her out of the lineup. There was great rejoicing at this elimination. When the sticks were pulled up, the friends and relatives of those represented by the sticks sent skyward shouts of praise.

When a male suspect was acquitted (by being pushed from the line of suspects and often knocked to the ground in the process), he was taken up on the shoulders of his supporters and paraded around the village. The women celebrated their freedom differently. Once out from under the cloud of suspicion, their happiness and relief was unfettered. These vindicated women, one after another as they were dismissed from the ranks of the accused, stripped from their bodies the only bit of clothing they wore: their wraparounds. They were proud of being acquitted and wanted to show the world they were free. Holding the garment above their heads, each went into an exciting, celebratory dance. Younger girls, upon being released, would return to their huts, where they would offer thanksgiving with no less grace or sincerity than their elders.

There was so much commotion during these demonstrations that the acolyte had to blow his horn for order. By now, there were only two suspects left in the line: a small village chief and an elderly woman. The witch doctor's discontent reached a new peak. He had failed to wring from the tormented the confession of guilt, which should have long ago been proffered. It was time to summon additional demons. This he did with the help of a peculiar dust, called "goofu." He drew from his fur-trimmed chapeau a small, wooden box. From this, he pinched a bit of dust and blew it over first one person, then another, until he had so christened every individual present, even ourselves. We do not know whether the dust came from the burned bones of saints or sinners, but the wind soon blew it from us into the air.

Time was getting short and something had to be done. The remaining sticks, which were also dusted with "goofu," were pulled up and hurled to their freedom. The two suspects remained standing: the small chief and the old woman, whom we learned was one of the chief's six wives. The story has seemingly become clear. It was believed that, in a jealous rage, she had made away with the baby, which was the offspring of another wife of the chief.

There was much palaver between the witch doctor and the government representative. A great argument ensued. The witch

doctor seemed to be saying, Here are the guilty, now what is to be done with them? But the civil authority did not appear satisfied. He seemed uncertain as to whether the small chief had much to do with the crime. Into the picture now came the only male in the line of the accused. He was a tall, thin, strange-looking fellow who carried a sort of Aaron's rod, or stick of authority. He wore a long, black, loose-fitting, sleeveless smock with a lone pocket over the left breast. He also wore a wide-brimmed, felt hat. We didn't know where he got the hat, but it has been said that Africa is the place where old hats go. His demeanor was proper, almost regal, throughout the entire ordeal.

The witch doctor ordered the acolyte to disrobe the small chief. His wooden staff was taken from him as well, and a worn packet of American cigarettes was found in his pocket. The chief stood solid and firm, even after being relieved of his clothing. He had been accused of being a witch, and being gifted, with the art of wishing. He could wish the destruction of anyone, it was charged, and tragedy would be brought to bear. It was finally agreed that he had wished the death of his wife's youngest child.

To our surprise, the chief, worn out from the proceedings, confessed to being a wishing expert. He even admitted to having wished the death of the baby because it did not belong to him. He maintained it was a bush baby, an illegitimate child. He would confess to nothing more.

The chief, again to our astonishment, was summarily cleared. There was no jungle law against wishing. His chagrin at being so humiliated in public prevented any demonstration of freedom.

This left the old woman.

Three planks were produced and placed on the ground, about three feet apart. The woman was roughly brought forward and placed between the first and second planks. Thus, symbolically, she was in prison. There was dancing and drumming anew. This time, the acolyte danced with the witch doctor, who was now free of his obligation to detect guilt. His gyrations were similar to a vulgarized hula dance.

What was to be done with old woman? Would she sip from the cup of sandalwood tea to prove her innocence? Would she

confess? If she took the cup, she would be tried by the tribe, and its laws were not civil. The punishment could be barbarous and torturous, with great suffering and, eventually, death. If she confessed, she could be placed in a real jail by civil authorities. She would be tried by a civil court and, if convicted, face a sentence of life imprisonment or death.

Tropical clouds were gathering. In the distance, there was a rumbling like the fire of war guns. Was it a roll of thunder? Or was it the drums of some distant tribe, about to descend upon us with spears, shields, and poison arrows? The villagers wanted the witch doctor to have his way, so they clamored for the cup. The drums continued without restraint. There was a murmur among those gathered: would the old woman be tortured, or would she confess from her symbolic jail cell?

The woman made a native sign by slowly spreading her hands upon the earth in front of her. She was pleading. Her mind was made up.

"I beg you, my people," she said.

At the signal of the witch doctor, the horn sounded. Three ear-splitting blasts rang through the jungle bush. Then, all was silent. No civilized court could be more respectful. The only sound to be heard was the light pelt of raindrops hitting the leaves. The government representative, the prisoner, and the witch doctor huddled low to the ground and went into a conference. The exhausted woman talked as she lay prostrate. There was more talk. Finally, she confessed.

The local soldiers now drew near to the slow beat of the drums. They stood over the besieged and nerve-wracked woman. By confessing, she had saved herself from the brutal hands of the tribe. She had thrown herself upon the civilized courts for judgment.

The witch doctor was not at all pleased by this unexpected turn of events, and he took up a maddening dance. He seemed to curse every drop of refreshing rain. He dashed off his headdress and flung it to the ground. He then approached the paramount chief of the tribe and appealed the woman's decision.

The chief had remained in the background throughout the day. But he had heard the entire proceedings, and it was his duty to sustain the customs of his people. He had always done so, as had the many paramount chiefs before him. He decreed that the prisoner be held for punishment by the tribe. There was pandemonium as the villagers, soldiers, onlookers, and witch doctor reacted to the pronouncement. But the chief's rule was absolute, and his decision was neither questioned nor challenged.

It was now dark in this high bush jungle and a storm was upon us. The white-robed government official was standing, arms folded, erect and dignified. Before him in a hollow square stood the prisoner, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. There was a loud peal of thunder, and refreshing winds set the palm trees swaying. We started back for camp as the great tropical rains came beating down. The witch doctor had brought justice in a land where the habits and customs had changed little in ten thousand years.

Roosevelt Visits Liberia (Few Whites Saw Him)

(The following was put together from newspaper clippings troops received from the States.)

In January 1943, up in North Africa, the eyes of the world were focused on the momentous conference between President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The two leaders met in Casablanca to shape their “unconditional surrender” plan. After his ten-day conference, according to newspaper clippings we received, Roosevelt was in no hurry to get home, for awaiting him was a crisis brewing over inflation, a fight over the Army’s size, and a decision regarding the appointment of Bronx Boss Ed Flynn as ambassador to Australia—one of the worst political decisions of FDR’s career.

After visiting the ancient city of Marrakech, with its picturesque, snow-capped Atlas Mountains and palm trees, the chief executive was carried two thousand miles in a four-motored plane by the Army Air Force Transport Command to Roberts Field, Liberia. There, the president lunched with Liberian President Edwin James Barclay, toured part of the million-acre Firestone Rubber Plantations, and reviewed the Forty-First Engineers. Few white troops saw the president during this trip and the reasons why were never made clear. I did manage to see Roosevelt by sneaking into the review and even got a couple of pictures of him.

Although the white troops were, for the most part, not permitted to see the American president, Tech. Fifth Grade Carmen

Bascone of Vineland, New Jersey, never tired of talking about what a privilege it was to make the seat covers for the president's jeep. Incidentally, the headline of a New York paper, which reached us several months later, caused some smirks because of the way it read. "President Roosevelt reviews Negro troops in a jeep." Who was in the jeep, the president or the troops?

Life in Monrovia

Whatever the soldiers did in the villages near camp was a thousand times better than what often occurred at the more "civilized" hot spots, such as Mama Lu's, Nellie Hodge's, Grand Hotel, and Ma Cooper's Rat Dive in Monrovia. These bustling brothels featured shapely madams who had access to ample amounts of liquor and charged the soldiers fabulous prices. Soldiers would souse themselves beyond the saturation point and pass out in the dark, mosquito-filled rooms where the madam's seductive scavengers would rifle their pockets, taking everything but the gold from their teeth. Some of the sorriest cases of hospitalization came as a result of weekend passes, which led to these sordid spots.

One fiendish, cannibalistic guttersnipe, Victoria, was an Americo-Liberian with a whimsical passion for biting the genitals of drunken soldiers, sometimes causing their organs to swell to the size of honeydew melons. She sent eight of our boys to the venereal wards, and the Army did nothing to have her imprisoned.

One of the chunky, bull-shouldered madams, Ma Cooper, had a mouth full of gold teeth. Ma always wore a kimono, which opened with the slightest breeze. Among her accomplishments, Ma was a songwriter and piano thumper. She had a house of gingham-dressed natives who would send goose pimples scurrying up the spine of even the hardest-shelled Baptist.

Anyone who became drunk in Ma's house usually sobered up pretty quickly once she commenced to pounding on the

warped piano. Ma's favorite song was "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down," and, as she sang it, one could well imagine just what caused the machine to collapse. In the middle of the song, Ma would stop thumping with her left hand, reach up and seize from the top of the piano a family-sized can of poolroom tale, which she would sprinkle between her breasts. Then she would pick up where she left off, continuing to punish the poor instrument brutally.

Ma usually had a wad of gum behind one ear. When she got the urge to chew it, she drew it out into strings, wrapped it around her fingers a couple of times, and then chewed—fingers and all. On one occasion, Ma had to run across the hall to get a drink. As she ran, a wad of gum—which, after months of use had no business being adhesive—dropped from behind her ear onto the greasy, ant-ridden floor. Ma stooped over, spread the wad with her index finger and shoved the gum back into her mouth.

Visits to the civilized brothels contributed to the vast amounts of venereal cases and malaria. These places were unsanitized and teemed with mosquitoes. And the Army did not enforce prophylactics. As a result, those who got town passes more often than not came back infected one way or the other.

The girls, on the other hand, were enjoying a prosperity they had never known. They often preached the gospel that bush girls were full of "belly fever" and that the soldiers should never indulge in them. The girls who wore gingham, they would say, were cleaner. They were taught to put on a sophisticated air and speak the best English they knew. Whenever a soldier would pinch one of the girls on the behind, she would act startled and say, "Do not do that. I am a virtuous Americo-Liberian. I want to be respected." Then, if she were asked if she liked American money, she would glow all over.

The girls in Monrovia, particularly the Americo-Liberians, were generally clumsy in their attempts to impress and win affection by saying they were from America. But many managed

to roll several of the American boys. One corporal from North Carolina, who spent his time barbering and cooking for our force, visited a brothel, which he said reminded him of Bloom's Alley in his own hometown. The building was large and its window shutters flapped in the wind.

"The long siege on the boat was getting me down," he said. "So I had to do something with the \$200 I had in my shoe. I met Marie, a pretty girl who looked like a hop-toad—all bumps. She sent me to the cleaners to the tune of \$150, but it was worth it. She was the first African girl to do it. Most of them would be okay if they would forget that Americo-Liberian baloney.

"She said she was from North Carolina. I knew she lied like hell because when I asked her what part, she said, 'Tennessee!' "

My most impressive romantic experience in this city came when another American and I were on pass. While standing on the corner of Broad Street, a small, kinky-haired lad, a smooth-cut sort of fellow, approached us without the slightest hesitation.

"There's an American girl in that red house who wants to see you soldiers," he said, pointing to a tilted house about an eighth of a mile down the road. Naturally, the sound of "American girl" started the hormones pumping through our veins. We hadn't seen a white girl in ten months and this was going to be a treat.

"Let's go down," my friends said, taking off in a cloud of dust.

"We'd better not go," I said, sprinting past him. It was obvious that the whole town knew we were coming, for small black children came running up saying, "She lives down there, sol-jahs, down there."

Presently, we arrived at the house where the "American girl" was said to be. It was a quaint domicile, nestled among other quiet, mossy Liberian homes. Each house seemed to have doors slightly ajar, and now and then we saw peering eyes staring at us. From the next-door neighbor's home came the eerie wail

of an organ, which reverberated down the granny street. On the piazza was sitting a buxom, smiling Negress, a perfect replica of Aunt Jemima, powerful enough to bend a ten-penny nail with her teeth. I jumped back, thinking she was the "American girl."

"How do you do, boys?" she beamed happily. "An American girl wants to see you. Please have a seat."

We felt somehow abashed, for something told us either she had a trick up her sleeve or the "American girl" had uncanny visual powers to spot us from such a distance. There was something peculiarly sinister about "Aunt Jemima's" pleasant smile, which displayed unique bridgework and plenty of African gold. She mechanically nodded her smiling head each time she spoke. There was a great deal of bewilderment in my palpitating heart, and the lack of coordination in my trembling knees undoubtedly suggested I was afflicted with arthritic twinges. The suspense was slowly killing me. And all the while, I thought of my wife: *What would you say if she knew I was fooling around like this?*

"The American girl will be out soon," our host repeated. Suddenly, from the hallway, came the sharp, hollow clatter of high heels and the rasp of leather against the hardwood floors. Like a high school boy on my first date, I wriggled like a worm. It's tough on a guy when he hasn't seen a white girl in so long. She appeared before us, as refreshing as a gardenia: a genteel, graceful, dragon-type of lady with a beautiful, slender body. She extended her mahogany-hued hand without saying a word—not even a hello. Well, the "American girl" was black, and for a moment, I was a bit disappointed. I seized her hand and shook it gently, as if she were something fragile. Her touch thrilled me even though she was chilly and clammy. My friend, the sergeant, over-inspired by her unique build, apparently mistook her hand for a pump handle.

"My name is Josephine Smith," she finally said. "I'm a missionary and I'm glad to see you boys. You see, we missionaries get lonesome too—especially at night, when only crickets

break up the hush of the evenings. That's why I want to talk to you."

There was a warmth in her voice, yet anyone but a soldier could have seen she was nothing but a malicious sentimentalist. When she asked for my name, I fabricated a moniker, calling myself "Dominic Maria." I figured it wasn't wise to give her my real name because of the possibility of becoming involved in things that the Army might not like.

Gradually, her conversation revealed why she wanted us. Meanwhile, my male inclinations grew sharper and sharper.

"Soldiers," she finally said, "I need your help. I'm an ailing missionary and can scarcely eke out an existence in my work. I'm contemplating, with your help of course, starting up a restaurant for your buddies and calling it 'American Café.'"

"Will there be girls?" my friend asked, half-rising off his seat.

"Well, I hadn't forgotten that angle," she said, drawing her dress tight across her breasts. "It's entirely possible for me to arrange to have girls."

My friend patted her on the back for coming up with such a swell idea.

"You see, boys," she continued, "all I need right now to start in business is fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" my companion barked. He caught himself, cooled off quickly, and said, "Hell, that's not much money, honey."

"If you loan it to me, you boys can be part managers," she promised. Obviously, she was poor at this game, yet she sensed we were taken with her clumsiness.

"What I need more important than money is foodstuffs," she told us. "Do you suppose you could bring me some spaghetti, butter, canned tomatoes, and hamburger?"

"Very easily," we answered. "Very easily."

My friend made a list of the items she urgently needed: one carton of butter, fifteen cans of tomatoes, fifty pounds of hamburger (if we didn't have it, we were told, get beef—it was just as good) and, “Don't forget that ten pounds of grated cheese.”

We told her our biggest trouble was getting salt. We could get our hands on all the other groceries, but salt was hard to come by.

“Bring me some socks, too,” she added. “And, oh yes, I've been paying twenty cents for atabrine tablets; can you get about eight hundred tablets?”

The sergeant told her it was best to order a thousand tablets, since they came in lots of one thousand. We made a list of all these items on a small piece of paper. But she wasn't satisfied with asking for quartermaster supplies. She also wanted a .45 caliber revolver. “I need protection,” she said. We drew the line there.

By now, my friend was becoming more and more interested in satisfying his physical urges, and he started talking in that direction.

“You know, Jo,” he began, “we like American girls—like you. We like Americo-Liberians because they are intelligent and the same as Americans in every way.”

At this point, she excused herself and rushed temptingly into her bedroom to the left of where I sat on the porch—and my eyes were glued to her every step of the way. My friend, like a bantam rooster, followed her into the bedroom and I could hear them whisper. Suddenly, a shout: \$25! The sergeant was moaning at the price, which I figured must have included the house and the entire city.

“You can't expect me to charge the same price as do native girls, can you?” she argued. “You see I am an Americo-Liberian. I came from America. Isn't it worth \$25 to be with a girl from America?”

My friend, responded like a man in his fifties courting a high-priced chorus girl: "Oh, come, Jo, let's make beautiful music together. But do we have to have such a high-prized jazz band?"

Meanwhile, I was sitting on the porch, steering clear of the big, fat, sugar mamma who was rolling amorous eyes in my direction.

"If you play ball with me," she said, grabbing me by the wrist, "Josephine will play ball with you, little friend."

That did it. I was in no mood to "play ball" with a 300-pound mamma. I did an about face because, although I had never heard of a soldier being raped, I thought that this was one time when it could have happened. "What a hell of a rat's nest," I said, racing off by myself.

A few weeks later, this same woman became entangled in a mess that involved the high command and nearly cost the citizenship of an American soldier. In one of the hottest cases any staff judge advocate handled, a decision was finally reached to fine the soldiers ninety dollars for stealing clothes from the woman and, among other things, kicking her in the groin.

Nellie Hodge's Whore House

One day while on patrol in Monrovia, one of the troops shouted, "Let's get some chow."

This wasn't a bad idea, seeing as we hadn't eaten since 5:00 A.M.

We found a building that seemed to be a spot of sufficient activity and ventured forward. We were greeted at the door by a wrinkled, chubby black lady who still had a lot of ginger in her.

"I'm Nellie Hodge," she said. "What can I do for you?"

"We'd like to grab a bite to eat," one of us said.

"We don't serve meals—something better."

She pointed into the next room. We took a look inside and saw about 75 to 100 small cots. And they weren't empty. The room was full of white soldiers mating with black teenagers. It looked like a sea of white moving up and down.

"Quite a sight," one of the boys said.

"They'll be through in a minute," Nellie informed us. "Only two dollars a throw."

Nellie grabbed me and said, "Why don't you R—?"

I told her I was too busy and walked on. I must say those black girls dressed in short white skirts did look quite enticing. Some wore just tight bras and shorty pants. Any red-blooded soldiers who wouldn't look twice at them would be in need of a transfusion. But that's all I did—look.

The Mystery of the Missing American

Marie, a young, English-speaking native, was sitting beside a table on the verendah one cool evening when a soldier some called "Mitch" slipped in beside her. She offered him a seat, but he refused, continuing into the house.

"There's no one there," Marie cried. "Come this way."

The soldier stopped, turned slowly, and asked, "Do you have any mammies here?"

"No," Marie answered.

He shuffled back toward Marie, then quickly pulled a rapier-keen knife from inside of his shirt.

"How would you like to see this dagger stickin' through a man?" he asked, running his thumb over the edge.

He made a minor thrust at her, and Marie, alarmed, leaped to her feet and grabbed the soldier by the wrist. They tussled and Marie, who was but a medium-sized girl, seized the dagger from the drunken soldier and threw it to her children, who had been

lured to the scene by the noise. They grabbed the knife and ran off to the bush with it.

Marie ran inside but the uninvited visitor followed. Suddenly, the intruder's disposition changed. He smiled and said he was merely fooling. She had no sooner accepted his apologies when he reverted to his black mood. He slapped the young mother several times and called her foul names.

"The reason I treat you that way is because you owe me six dollars," he muttered. He then struck her heavily behind the neck.

It was more than the young woman could endure. She grabbed an ax and, raising it, warned, "If you give me another blow, I am going to knock you on the head!"

But Mitch again said he was just toying with her, and he pleaded with her to accept his apologies.

"You have found that I don't want to strike you because you know I am a woman," Marie responded. "You are taking advantage of me."

Her assailant glowered with his fists tied in knots. Marie warned him to stand fast.

"I am not afraid of a soldier, even if I am a woman," Marie screamed.

Once again, the soldier smiled broadly. He walked slowly toward Marie, asking her to put down the ax. When he was able to get close enough, he threw his arms around her and smiled into her face.

"I don't mean to do you any harm, lady," he whispered. But as if to disprove his own words, he again became violent. He grabbed Marie and attempted to crush her skull against a banister. She mustered enough strength to push him to the floor. The seemingly schizophrenic soldier lay there, panting fiercely. Marie could smell the sweet, heavy odor of cane juice, which seemed to permeate his entire body. He appeared subdued and Marie, convinced he was too drunk to put up any more of a fight,

decided to drag him to the pizza gate where she could attempt to roll him down the steps.

But the soldier quickly leapt to his feet and bounded for the door. Marie was relieved to see him sprinting toward the road. As she retreated to the verandah, she was startled by the crack of a pistol coming from the direction in which the intruder had run.

Although exhausted and frightened, she ran toward the sound of the shot. When she arrived on the scene, others were milling about, but there was no body. All that was left was a streak of blood in the dust. No one, not even the U.S. Army, ever found any trace of the soldier. Nor did anyone ever learn who had fired the fatal shot.

Native Sex Customs

The proliferation of polygamy undoubtedly had a profound effect on American soldiers' venereal rate. With the amount of bed hopping—or, more accurately, hut hopping—that went on, it was all but unavoidable.

Native males who were accustomed to gathering all the wives they could for the soldiers, not to mention themselves, ran into all sorts of matrimonial complications—especially when their wives deserted them to live with the soldiers. Through such intermingling, the soldiers had ample opportunity to learn much in the way of the native love life. A few customs are mentioned here as a matter of interest.

The general idea of owning a lot of wives is that it designates power—power not in a sexual sense but, rather, from a social and economical standpoint. If a chief has, say, fifty wives, he is known to be a fifty-woman man and is considered to be a whirling tycoon by his fellow tribesmen. If he needs collateral on the spur of the moment, he can pawn a wife. She would then be under the complete domination of the new boss; she would have to conduct herself in any way he saw fit, including having children.

The pawning of women was practiced not only by the aborigines but in the civilized sections along the coast. Strangely enough, some wives would become extremely jealous whenever another woman became involved with their husband. An article in the *African Morning Post*, dated April 24, 1944, provides proof—and appeared fifty years before John and Lorena Bobbitt

made headlines in the U.S.!—"Jealous wife kills husband by attack on male organ!!"

Sometimes a native man finds a wife to be unsatisfactory for some sexual or other reason. Or perhaps she suddenly adopts the notion that her husband, who might be plagued with forty wives, is a poor provider. In either case, the dowry—which may have consisted of bulls, goats, ivory tusks, clothing, etc.—must be returned. It would take weeks for an able accountant to figure out what her keep has cost her ex-husband and then determine the difference. This type of wrangling constituted the most common court cases of the time.

Fighting the Sex Battle *(was not easy)*

It is difficult to relate how agonizing it was to live in a jungle outpost and keep from having sex. I had two buffers that steered me away from sexual contact. For one, I married shortly before I went overseas. We were sweethearts from the small town of Wayland, New York, and we vowed to remain true "'till I got back.'" The other advantage I had was my part-time job training natives to become workers and soldiers. I made recruits undress so I could look them over from head to foot. When you see sexual glands that are diseased, deformed, and evidently unscrubbed for years, you think twice about intercourse with "wild stuff." I saw enough naked prostitutes on Sunday morning inspections in Shangri-La and Paradise to put the brakes on my own sex drive.

So what does a soldier in his 20s do, 5,000 miles from home, with a sex drive almost as strong as a hunger drive? Sex, remember, is nature's way of perpetuating the human race. It's a natural and healthy desire. I was one of millions of males who

reached their sexual peak in their late teens. A normal person must have an outlet.

We had two chaplains, one Catholic and one Protestant. The Catholic chaplain urged us to practice abstinence. (It did no good!) The Protestant chaplain mentioned that self-gratification (masturbation) was preferable to sex in the bush. Yet, like his Catholic counterpart, he said it was “a sin to spill seed on the ground.” Didn’t the Bible tell of how Onan was slain for detestably spilling his seed? Neither the chaplains nor the writers of the Bible were good biologists. Here’s why: Seed is the fertilized “ovule” (of plants and animals) containing an embryo and capable of producing a new organism. If sperm (semen) is cast upon the ground, it is not seed and by itself cannot produce a living organism. So how could it be a sin?

A lot of readers gulped and wrinkled their foreheads when columnist Ann Landers had the courage to once write: “I am recommending (as an alternative to sex) self-gratification or mutual masturbation, whatever it takes to release the sexual energy. This is a sane and safe alternative to intercourse, not only for teenagers, but also for older men and women who have lost their partners.

“I do not want to hear from clergymen telling me it’s a sin. The sin is making people feel guilty about responding to a basic, fundamental human drive. I love my readers . . . and my mission is to be of service.”

Nothing wrong with that advice—if only we had someone fifty years ago to teach our troops this sound bit of logic.

The Army handed out condoms by the thousands, but one of the doctors I assisted said condoms didn’t always provide safe sex. One told me, “It’s a dangerous lie.” Not only were they affected by the heat and humidity over there in the jungle, condoms could be unsafe due to improper storage, handling and usage.

We learned that the breakage rate during vaginal intercourse was 14 percent. For an active person who averages sex three times a week, a 14 percent breakage rate translates into a breakage every two weeks. To make matters worse, as mentioned earlier, native girls who underwent the brutal genital mutilation often had jagged pieces of flesh, which tore condoms. No, condoms could not be counted on to provide safe sex in equatorial Africa.

I decided the only safe and sane alternative to intercourse was self-gratification (there I go, fearing to use the M word). I was taught in Sunday school how sinful it was supposed to be. I heard how it could cause insanity, blindness, pimples, hair loss, memory loss, slovenliness, weakness of will, etc. A good friend of mine, Sgt. G—, slept with a native one night. Two days later, his testicles were the size of honeydew melons. Army doctors were puzzled and asked me to ship his clothing and personal effects back to the States, along with the hapless sergeant.

Professor John Gagnon of the State University of New York at Stony Brook said, "It remains a puzzle for me why a relatively innocuous behavior (masturbation) evokes tides of anxiety and fear in an otherwise well-adjusted people."

The Army did discourage sex by hauling in grotesque human bodies with enlarged breasts, testicles, you name it—while we were eating.

Sixty years later, I find myself on a health advisory board for a high school, trying to fight drugs, unplanned pregnancies, and youth violence, and masturbation is among the topics least covered in sex education classes. This means you have people who don't know their own bodies. The pall of silence about it should stop. People have to quit feeling guilty about it and not think, *What's wrong with me?*

Many troops preferred to go into the dark and dangerous bush at night to satisfy their libidos, rather than go to sleep themselves. One fine Christian boy said, "Abe, why don't you go to

church Sunday?" I told him I did. He was one of those fellows who rammed around in the bush at night, then offset it by going to church once a month or so.

I'm no angel when it comes to women. I love to watch them and I'll continue to do so. I'll never forget the first white woman I saw in a year—a British Airlines hostess. I thought it would take three men to hold me down.

How Other Countries Handled the Sex Problem

Every army has its own system of handling the sex problem. The Japanese had their "comforting girls," but they did not provide them with anything for their efforts. The girls made their own living and spent most of their earnings on clothes and food. The Japanese army had worked out a time schedule for brothel-visiting officers and soldiers in China. The hours between 4:00 and 8:00 P.M. were for enlisted men, from 8:00 to midnight was reserved for noncommissioned officers. The officers entered only after midnight.

The pay scale was tied to rank. A private usually paid 1.5 yen. "Non-coms" paid 3 yen while officers shelled out 4.5 yen. On one occasion, Chinese troops raiding a Japanese headquarters found an underground tunnel containing seven dead Japanese women, dressed in Sunday clothes. Their faces were heavily made up. Evidently, the Japanese were unable to evacuate the harlots, so they murdered them before fleeing to the mountains.

In Poland, houses of prostitution were provided to German soldiers under direct control of the military. One of these brothels, according to a dispatch issued by the Secret Service, was described as having the lower floor used as quarters for the guards and the second floor set aside for the girls, who were encouraged to provide an attractive, homelike atmosphere. Their fee was about 5 reichmarks, roughly \$2.

According to a report in *Newsweek*, the Germans, during the occupation of Italy, maintained and supervised about ten legalized brothels. Admittance could be gained only by a ticket

purchased from the military, and since the Roman girls did not like the Germans and were not hungry, there was no widespread problems with sexually-transmitted diseases and the like until the Allies arrived.

The Allied troops brought likable ways and plenty of money. These factors contributed to the first flagrant boom of prostitution. Girls began to parade openly outside the Army rest hotels, and the MPs had to weed out known prostitutes at the door.

Nevertheless, prostitution continued to flourish. Even middle-aged women and older woman reportedly joined the rush for rewards up to \$20 to \$30 a night. The upper-class Romans called it *Il trionfo dell brutte*—"The triumph of the ugly women."

Looking Back on Liberia

Liberia's 175-year modern history has had its share of heartache and bloodshed, but there remains hope for peace and prosperity in this coastal African nation roughly the size of Pennsylvania.

Just how the indigenous race migrated to Liberia is a matter of conjecture, but some historians believe the first people inhabited the Liberian shores in 9000 B.C. after moving in waves from the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.

The first tribe to invade West Africa, if traditional beliefs can be depended on, were the Golas—a strong and fierce-looking people with hair on their bodies. They lived in caves and the hollows of large trees, and existed on a diet of fish and jungle fruit. About 6000 B.C., another wave of invaders entered the region—the Kumbas, ferocious warriors who trekked through the swamps of Central Africa to the Liberian coast. The Kumbas defeated the Golas in a bloody battle and became rulers of the land. As time went by, the Kumba regime deteriorated and from it sprang several smaller tribal groups, the Kpessi, the Gbandi, and the Mendi among them. These tribes shared similar customs and languages, and as a medium of exchange, they probably used iron rods and gourds—as some tribes still did in the 1940s.

In about 500 B.C. these people saw their first white men: Harno, the Carthaginian, and his sailors, who were seeking out trade markets to increase the commerce of Carthage. The white explorers went as far as Cape Mount, the present site of Robertsport, a few miles from where our fighting forces were located. They met the Gola tribesmen and exchanged with them commodities such as pepper, hides, ivory, civet perfume, and cotton goods

for iron bars, saucers, and even gunpowder, although it didn't become useful until the seventeenth century.

Today, indigenous tribes still make up about 95 percent of Liberia's population. The Bassa, the Kpelli, and the Kru all claim to be the nation's largest. The Bassa are divided, roughly, into two groups, the coastal Bassa and the bush, or primitive Bassa, who live in the nation's interior. The Kpelli tribe strongly revere the dead (graveyards clutter Kpelli country) and are more stable farmers than the itinerant Bassa.

The Bassa and Kru have a similar language. While English is the official language of Liberia, it is spoken by only about 10 percent of its inhabitants. Many tribe members speak one of about 20 different languages, which have spun off from the Niger-Congo language group. The literacy rate hovers around 40 percent—approximately 50 percent for males and 30 percent for females.

Bassa natives are well known for their tendency to clear a spot of land, plant and harvest, then move on to a new site. This accounts for the many hundreds of deserted villages formerly occupied by this tribe. The Kru tribe is hardy and industrious. Originally, they were slave traders and fishermen. Today, they are believed to be among the finest stevedores available. This was certainly the case during World War II. The U.S. Army hired a crew of Kru men from Monrovia, and they were highly efficient in unloading cargo ships. They slept on the ship's deck and required but little rice to keep them going. The result was much cost was saved.

The tribal mark of the Kru consisted of a broad blue band between the center of the forehead and the bridge of the nose. The mark was made by cutting deeply into the skin and rubbing charcoal or indigo into the wound. When the cut healed, a slightly raised scar was left, dark blue in color. Tribesmen believed this was the mark of freedom. Sometimes, they also made two blue, triangular marks starting from the outer corner of each eye and

extending to the edge of the cheekbone. Kru regarded children with suspicion—as did many tribes in Liberia—and if male twins were born, one was sometimes destroyed.

The Grebo tribe (once called Ggopoen), a branch of the Kru tribal group, was found in the southern corner of Liberia, around Cape Palmas and up the Cavalla River. The Grebo were an advanced tribe whose members were generally intelligent. From them came the first tribesmen to be elected vice president of Liberia. The Grebo, like the Kru, were roughly divided into two groups: the coast dwellers, most of whom have adopted Christianity, and the inland dwellers, who embraced traditional native customs. Only about 10 percent of Liberians currently practice Christianity. Some 20 percent are Muslims and the remaining 70 percent or so follow traditional beliefs.

Many Grebos believed that death could be caused by witchcraft, and all lived in circular or oblong houses plastered with clay as a way of warding off the spirits. The Grebo are sometimes mistaken for Bassa, to whom they are related, and the Kru.

Along the northeastern frontier, there is a belt of Muhammadan tribes who have come down from Sudan and who speak Arabic dialects. They make up the majority of the nation's Muslims. Scattered throughout the eastern and central part of Liberia were smaller tribe, including the Gio and the Bella. The Vai, another Muhammadan group, resided in western Liberia, between the Mano and St. Paul rivers. Superior intellectually, it was the only tribe in Liberia to develop its own alphabet and system of writing. Some thought the Vai language might become the dominant speech of Liberia, although this never seemed likely to me.

As its national flag—red and white stripes, and a white star on a blue background in the upper left-hand corner—attests, Liberia was the offspring of American birth. The upheaval and corruption that continue today have been described by some as resulting from a lack of parental supervision. The baby republic

was left to wean itself without protection and correction by its deficient godfather, Uncle Sam.

Early in the nineteenth century, when slavery was in vogue, religious leaders and others interested in the welfare of slaves put forth the idea of establishing a Negro republic for repatriation of the black race, where it could develop a civilization and system of living unhampered by the "selfish exploitation of the white race." This colonization movement decided it was natural to select West Africa as the home for this experiment. Gen. Robert Harper of Maryland, who endorsed the idea of repatriation, suggested that the colony of freed slaves on the bulge of Africa be named "Liberia"—land of freedom—and the city that was to be its capital be named after President Monroe, who was keenly interested in the establishment of the colony. Thus, Monrovia.

In 1818, eighty-eight freed slaves sailed for Africa under the charge of three Americans. Most of those on board perished before reaching the present site of Liberia. In the early 1820s, another small group of emigrants aboard the United States Schooner *Alligator* arrived at what is now Monrovia, with the idea of securing the land for the Liberian colony. This first band landed on a small dot called Providence Island just inside the mouth of the St. Paul River. More colonists later arrived. These early Liberians went through terrible agony—if they weren't being attacked by native tribes who wanted their land back, they were succumbing to tropical diseases. The American warship *Squalus* arrived in 1822, carrying gunpowder and flint guns, which the immigrants used to fight off the hordes of angry tribesmen. The timely arrival of this ship allowed the colonists a chance to take root on the coastal fringe.

Today, descendants of these early immigrants, known as "Americo-Liberians," make up about five percent of the nation's population of more than 3 million.

The Republic of Liberia declared its independence on July 26, 1847, but it has remained largely undeveloped. The warfare

that marked its earliest days has continued right up through this year. According to the *CIA World Factbook*:

Years of civil strife have destroyed much of Liberia's economic infrastructure, made civil administration nearly impossible, and brought economic activity virtually to a halt. The deterioration of economic conditions has been greatly exacerbated by the flight of most business people with their expertise and capital. Civil order ended in 1990 when President Samuel Kenyon Doe was killed by rebel forces. In April 1996, when forces loyal to faction leaders Charles Ghankay Taylor and Alhaji Kromah attacked rival ethnic Krahn factions, the fighting further damaged Monrovia's dilapidated infrastructure. Fighting waned in late May 1996, allowing West African peacekeepers to regain control of Monrovia. The Abuja II peace accord was signed in August 1996 replacing the Chairman of the ruling Council of State, Wilton Sankawulo, with Ruth Perry. National elections were scheduled for 30 May, 1997, but long-term prospects for peace will remain poor unless the warring factions can overcome their greed, mutual suspicions, and ethnic hatreds.

When it comes to offering recommendations for correcting the woes of Liberia, only those who have made a thorough study of the country are qualified. Most suggestions border on little more than lip service and double talk. "More education, more roads," may sound good, but it completely overlooks other important necessities necessary for progress. Most of the missionaries who have lived in Liberia say the problem is more complex than anyone has yet hinted.

The answers, of course, must come from within. Until the dust from ongoing political upheavals settles, Liberia's natural resources (iron ore, rubber, and timber) and industries (rubber and food processing, palm oil processing and mining) will do it little good.

As recently as September 1998, President Charles Taylor

was accusing former rivals and cabinet members of plotting to overthrow his government. In the capital of Monrovia, meanwhile, residents were said to be living in constant fear due to threats and attacks by former rebel leader Roosevelt Johnson. "The place has become a no-go area, especially at night because of the continuous lawlessness," a community leader told the Panafrikan News Agency on September 1, 1998. "More people are being attacked, assaulted and robbed by gangs of thugs almost every day."

In many ways, the nation today is little further along the road to progress than it was when American troops pulled out at the end of World War II.

The African Pulse

... Nowhere is the defeat of the Axis better appreciated than in Africa, itself. You can be sure that the mysterious bush telegraph has been at work. Quicker than speeches or newspapers, or even the wireless, the drums have been tapping it out in the Sudan, along the Ivory Coast, and 'round the great lakes. On stretched antelope skin over hollow tree trunks, African hands have been beating out the good news. The rolling of the drums has been heard through the Congo, along the Niger, in all the kraals of Zambesi, and all the shambas of Tanganyika. The message of the African drum has reached the whole continent.

*—Major Lewis Hastings,
(speaking to the British people over the BBC)*

News of the Allied victory in the First World War was received by natives even before the whites in Africa knew of it. Likewise, natives learned of the death of the Queen of England well ahead of the white population of Africa, word having been passed along via drums.

One of the most striking aspects of African life is the drums. It was the drums that kept American troops awake nights—until they became accustomed to their ubiquitous rhythms. And it is the drums American troops remember more strongly than anything else about the continent.

The drum was the most powerful institution in native African life. From north to south, from east to west, and across central

Africa, the drums' function and tradition has remained virtually unchanged through the centuries. The instrument plays a vital role in every custom or occasion in African life. Throughout the continent, deaths, marriages, trials, war dances, tribal hunts, and circumcisions all were accompanied by ceremonial percussion. The steady, sometimes nerve-wracking throb could be heard even when all else was silent. It was aptly called the African pulse.

Even Emperor Haile Salassie owned an amazing set of drums—war drums each reportedly thirty feet in diameter. The boom of these instruments could reportedly be heard over a twenty-mile radius.

According to researcher S.T. Kelson, the Yoruba tribe utilized extraordinary, gender-specific drums: the pitch of the drum, high or low, was said to designate the gender of the drummer to the listener.

No drum in Africa was more impressive than the famous "Talking Drum." Across thick, dense forests, malarial swamps, and the banks of sluggish rivers, this amazing instrument tapped out its message to destinations hundreds of miles away. The message would be relayed on and on, from village to village. White men called this the "Bush Telegraph," and that is all they knew about it.

Kelson said that two codes were in use: one by which messages could be interchanged within the tribal area, and another—a sort of lingua franca—whereby messages could be relayed or transmitted far beyond tribal boundaries.

The drum language was not based on a series of dots and dashes, as was the Morse code. Rather, the drums were made to talk. Trees, animals, birds, fish, humans, innate objects—all had their own distinct names. Rolls, taps, and rhythms that were meaningless to white men became coherent sentences when translated by the tribal drummers.

While we were unable to extract any literal meaning from the incessant drum beats, we grew to cherish their familiarity.

The constant raps and rhythms became a backdrop, a soundtrack of sorts, to our many months on the Africa continent.

Is the Military Colorblind in 2000?

I've talked to many black servicemen and they say that the military does better than American society at large. But, many minorities say discrimination still exists in the military.

Retired Army Col. William DeShields says the military deserved its reputation as one of the most colorblind parts of American society. "Minorities do seem to get opportunities that aren't open on the outside. That doesn't mean anything is perfect. There are still problems," he stated.

The military has been miles ahead of the civilian population on the race issue. The Pentagon, in the most thorough survey ever of race relations in the military, found that 75 percent of blacks and 67 percent of Hispanics said they had experienced racially offensive behavior, compared to 62 percent of whites.

Despite years of efforts to promote equal opportunity in the military, major differences remain between whites' and minorities' perceptions of how they are treated in the military.

We had many instances of racial stupidity, but the one that takes the cake is what occurred on a Sunday morning when we were trying to get some religion.

Our troops had both a Catholic and a Protestant chaplain. Both were wonderful men. I attended the Protestant "church," which was a clearing in the jungle with logs for seats. Our service lasted one hour and the highlights of each session was a 10-minute session of six black soldiers who sang hymns. They sang "Grace," "He walks with Me," and others. Their songs were so good they brought tears to our eyes. They were the "Mills Brothers" of the bush.

Our first sergeant was a southern racist. He had no use for their sacred songs.

“I want those niggers out,” he said. “I can’t get anything out of church with them singers.”

We told the Sergeant the songs meant a lot to us.

“I want them out,” he insisted.

So he went to the chaplain and said, “If you don’t get those niggers out, I’m not coming to church on Sundays!”

The chaplain was saddened but he went along with the First Sergeant. He asked the boys not to sing on Sundays, but they could still come. This enraged most of the church goers. Nearly half of us stopped going to the “bush church” after that!

Epilogue

After V-E Day, an order was issued: "All troops with more than two years duty can go back to the States." I'd been in Africa coming up to thirty-six months. I had two choices: take a banana boat out of North Africa, and get home in several weeks, or take a four-prop plane out of West Africa and arrive in a few days. I was so homesick it was not a choice. We boarded the plane, literally packed like sardines, and "island hopped" home. First to Ascension Island, a dot in the Atlantic, and eventually to Miami.

Orders came to report to San Pedro, California, to get ready for duty in the Pacific Theater. Katy came with me: the "getting ready" seemed endless—the food was great, the pace was like a vacation. But the soldiers were frustrated. We wanted to get done what we needed to do and get on with our lives.

Watching Herman Wouk's series "the Winds of War" some years ago, I remembered one part of the "getting ready" for the Pacific Theater. One day we were going through what seemed to be an endless series of physicals. Robert Mitchum, the actor, was also an Army officer. He had us line up for a physical. A whole group of guys lined up and jumped up and down naked in front of him.

Mitchum barked an order: "All right, men, spread your cheeks!" Which cheeks? some wondered. Mitchum didn't miss a beat—he put two fingers in his mouth and spread his cheeks so wide you could see every one of his actor-white teeth. We were fit to continue to serve.

Not many days after the Robert Mitchum physical, when we were ready to be shipped out, a newspaper headlined screamed,

“Japan bombed.” Not so long after, V-J Day arrived, and we weren’t going anywhere but home. We were the lucky ones.

George “Doc” Abraham
Naples, New York
January 2000

\$11.95

In *The Belles of Shangri-La*, George "Doc" Abraham describes duty in the U.S. Army in Africa during World War II.

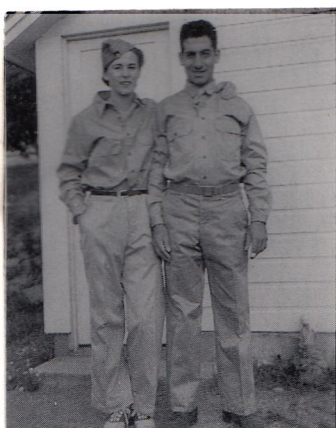
The stories will shock, delight, and surprise. Descriptions of army-sponsored brothels, witch doctor healing, and racial terms politically incorrect today nonetheless tell an honest story of race relations

decades before the civil rights era. History buffs should appreciate the anecdotes and photos in the context of the time.

The photos—many censored during the war—tell the story of Task Force 5889, one of the army's few integrated units, and its arrival in a place where malaria raged and snakes the length of tractor trailers scared the hell out of the unsuspecting.

But it is also a soldier's love story—Sergeant Abraham married his "war bride" Katy on a 36-hour leave. Her faith that he would return sustained him. Today, Abraham's book shines a spotlight on a little-documented aspect of a well-known war.

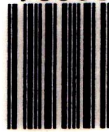
GEORGE "DOC" ABRAHAM and his wife, Katy, both Cornell alumni, are horticulturists who launched *The Green Thumb* in 1948, an award-winning garden column and radio show they continue to this day. They teach at local schools and colleges, volunteer in their community, Naples, New York, and write "how-to" books enjoyed by the nation's 90,000,000 gardeners.



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